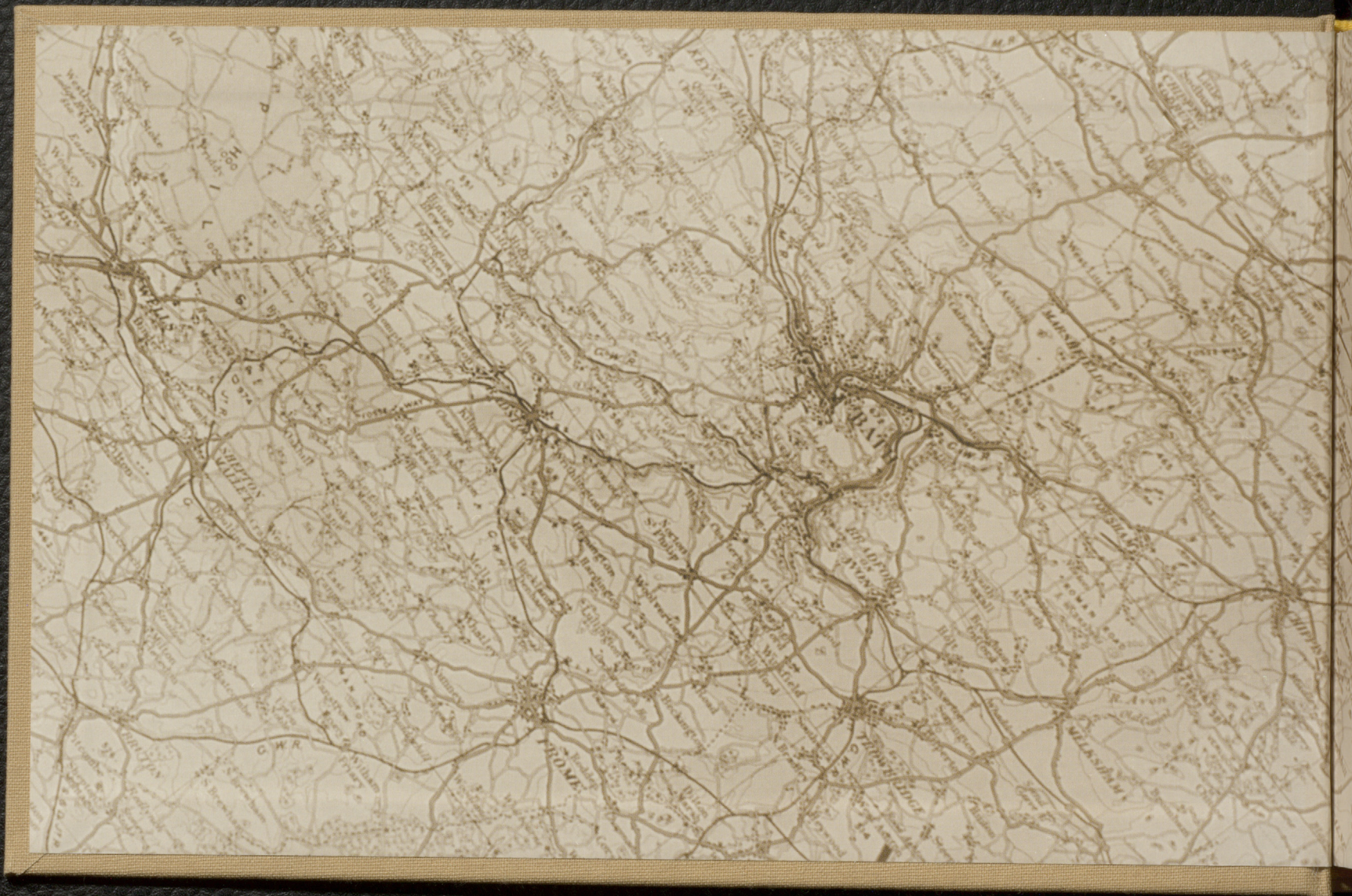


John Bland
English Travel Sketchbook





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John Bland
English Travel Sketchbook



John Bland English Travel Sketchbook

John Bland Canadian Architecture Collection
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Montréal, Québec
2003

Legal Deposit: 2nd trimester 2003
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The map has been adapted from the Ordnance Survey Atlas of England and Wales (Southampton: Ordnance Survey, 1922)

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Preface

The gentle minde by gentle deeds is known;
For a man by nothing is so well bewrayed
As by his manners.

Edmund Spenser

In the early 1970s, when John Bland (1911-2002) brought to the attic in the Redpath Library what looked like a giant bird's nest of architectural drawings, he wasn't just cleaning house. He was stepping down after thirty years as the first Canadian-born director of the McGill School of Architecture. Quietly he sought to honour the legacy of his predecessors - Percy Erskine Nobbs and Ramsay Traquair - by preserving their personal and professional archives. Gradually, Bland added other architectural *fonds*: the work of architects Edward & W. S. Maxwell and John Archibald; the projects of his students, Arthur Erickson and Moshe Safdie; along with many others. Today, the collection that now proudly bears its founder's name is no longer the array of *disiecta membra* that once packed the Nobbs Room, but a hive of activity by McGill students, researchers, and heritage experts. Here, courses on the History of Canadian Architecture and Heritage Preservation are taught, here lost Montreal buildings are studied based on actual documentation, and here even the eclectic furnishings designed by

architects "archived" in the Bland Collection stand as vivid reminders of the significance with which architectural records can inform our historic understanding of built work.

In his discreet and unostentatious way, John Bland laboured to preserve more than seventy architectural collections - some 200,000 plans, drawings, photographs, models, and books. Today these form part of the McGill Libraries. Many have been made accessible in an electronic form as well. Not surprisingly, however, the only *fonds* to which John Bland paid scant attention was his own. His life-long, painstaking search to understand and validate the work of others left little scope for self-documentation. Therefore, we were delighted to learn that a delicate travel sketchbook of his student years had been discovered among his papers after his death and would be generously donated to McGill by his wife and children. I can think of no nobler tribute to his exemplary life than making available to his students, friends, and colleagues this closely-observed, subtly rendered record of the architecture of a small corner of the picturesque Cotswold Hills.

I am deeply grateful to Fay Bland and her children - Clara, Andrew, John, and Harry- for their continued support of the McGill Libraries and of the collection begun by their husband and father; to David Covo, for his sensitive introduction to the context and the images from the Bland travel sketchbook; to Linda Graif and Andrew Ensslen for their

help with the production of the facsimile; to Marilyn Berger, Head, Blackader-Lauterman Library of Architecture and Art; and to the RHW Foundation for the financial support of this publication.

Dr. Irena Murray
Chief Curator
Rare Books and Special Collections
John Bland Canadian Architecture Collection
McGill University Libraries

Introduction

Why do architects sketch when they travel? If the image of an architect hunched over a drawing pad or a sketchbook in some foreign place seems familiar, it is because we have been doing this for centuries.¹ The popular notion that the sketchbook provides an alternative to the camera - as a means of documenting experience before the development of photography - may have been true in the nineteenth century, but it does not explain why the sketchbook has survived as an essential item in our carry-on baggage, despite the availability of the camera and a tantalizing array of digital imaging devices.

Asked why we continue to pack both our camera and our drawing materials when we travel, some architects might refer to the example of architects such as le Corbusier, who wrote that the purpose of making travel sketches is "...to fix deep down in one's experience what is seen...to look, and then to observe, and finally perhaps to discover."² The rituals associated with travel sketching provide an intellectual and physical framework for our encounters with new environments. Making drawings defines a relationship with a place that is simply not possible, at least for most people, with mechanical forms of documentation that come between the observer and the subject. The act of drawing takes time, whether measured in minutes or hours, and the drawings that we produce record not only what we see but also how we think; they are the evidence of a process - a search for meaning - in which knowledge is acquired and understanding of the world is developed.

This publication is a facsimile of a sketchbook completed by John Bland, probably in the mid-thirties, when he was a graduate student in Town Planning at the Architectural Association in London. The sketchbook was discovered with a collection of other papers shortly after his death in March 2002. Neither his family nor his recent collaborators recall having seen it before, and no one can explain why it remained buried all this time, almost seventy years. Whether private, like a personal diary, or simply forgotten in a box with other material from his time in England, the book provides a remarkable glimpse of the early years of what would become a long and distinguished career.

The drawings fall into two groups. The first consists of fifteen pages, mostly streetscapes and buildings, with studies of furniture, structure and architectural details. The sites named define a more or less diagonal line, running southwest to northeast and measuring roughly one hundred kilometres in length, between the town of Wells at the lower end and Burford at the upper. The tour seems to start in Wells - although the only reference to that place is a thumbnail sketch of a barn, one of a series of light drawings on p. 7 identified as 'memory sketches' - and apparently ends in Burford. This first collection of drawings may document one trip or possibly a series of excursions from London. Most of the places visited lie along the eastern edge of the Cotswold Hills, and some of them - Cirencester, a Roman town, and the tiny communities of Siddington and Ampney Crucis - are within two or three kilometres of each other, an

easy walking distance for a young man in his mid-twenties.

The second group consists of twelve pages of sketches that include the legs of tables and chairs from Nash's family mansions along with other furniture and numerous studies of architectural wrought iron work and ecclesiastical artefacts in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

All of the sketches are in pencil, although the drawings of religious objects and other metalwork in the second group have been further developed with a sepia wash; the wash, which may have been applied later, clarifies complex forms and expresses the metallic finish of the objects presented. The sketches are without exception meticulously drawn, with great confidence and little or no evidence of erasures.

The subject matter is rich and diverse. Bland's interest in the architecture of the village streetscape is clear; he studies materials and textures, structure and form, composition and proportion, and seems particularly drawn to the special nature of windows and entrance doorways. But he is also interested in furniture; one drawing on page 11, a carefully dimensioned perspective of a chair in Siddington, enjoys the additional distinction of being the only sketch in which white has been added to render reflections of light on the polished wood surfaces. Elsewhere in the sketchbook, many other subjects - embroidery in a Cirencester church, possibly part of a tapestry, chickens in a farmyard in Norton St. Philip, a weather cock, a spit jack and fireplace toasters,

door knockers, chalices and all the trappings of the church service - compete for and receive his attention. Whether exploring an English country lane or a corridor in the Victoria and Albert, Bland was not so much easily as willingly distracted.

The drawings on pages 10 and 12 of barns and stables in Siddington and Ampney Crucis express a special interest in the elegant timber and stone structures of the countryside. Perspective sketches, sections, a corner detail and studies of heavy timber roof trusses share the pages with notes that pose questions and suggest answers, that speculate on the origin of vernacular roof forms and the significance of rounded corners in dry stone walls. It is in these pages that the sketchbook is in some ways most convincing; it is here that it most clearly reveals itself as a journal, presenting images of objects and buildings along with ideas about the origins of forms and the nature of materials.

The subject matter also dramatizes an important difference between this sketchbook and the more traditional notebooks that Bland's contemporaries would have kept to document their own explorations of Paris, Rome, Athens and other sites on the normal European tour. There are no monuments here, no images of St. Paul's or Trafalgar Square or Westminster Abbey. There are no views of interior spaces. And, perhaps most significantly, although there are numerous carefully drawn cross-sections - mainly studies of structural framing - there are no floor plans.

We do not find in Bland's drawings, as in Louis Kahn's travel sketchbooks of 1928 and 1929,³ a preview of issues and ideas that would later surface in his built work. What we discover instead is a series of exquisite drawings that provide a surprisingly clear preview of what would become a life-long interest in the vernacular, in the anonymous architecture of town and streetscape, in the extraordinary craftsmanship expressed in the work of ordinary carpenters and metal-smiths.

The sketchbook illustrates an approach to drawing that was surely the product of his education at McGill and in particular, of his experience with the tradition of the summer Sketching School, which had been introduced into the curriculum in 1921. Irena Murray has suggested that Bland's interest in the vernacular may also be seen as the direct legacy of his studies with Professor Ramsay Traquair, Director of the School of Architecture between 1913 and 1939, who found in the buildings and carvings of the Quebec countryside the foundation of a distinctly Canadian architecture. It was Traquair, in fact, who had led the second Sketching School to Toronto and Kingston, probably in 1922, at which time both sketching and measured drawing were part of the course.

Although the sketchbook itself would not surface until after his death, elements of the drawings and the ideas expressed in them would reappear decades later on the blackboards of the School of Architecture and in the notebooks of stu-

dents in the course that he developed and taught for many years, History of Architecture in Canada, the first of its kind in this country. When he spoke of the work of craftsmen as emotionally and aesthetically appealing, of expression and utility as generating the form of everyday objects, of chairs and chair rails and naturally bent timber frames in buildings and ships, the connection between the images in the sketchbook and new ways of thinking about the world appears as a clear and unbroken line between England and Montreal.

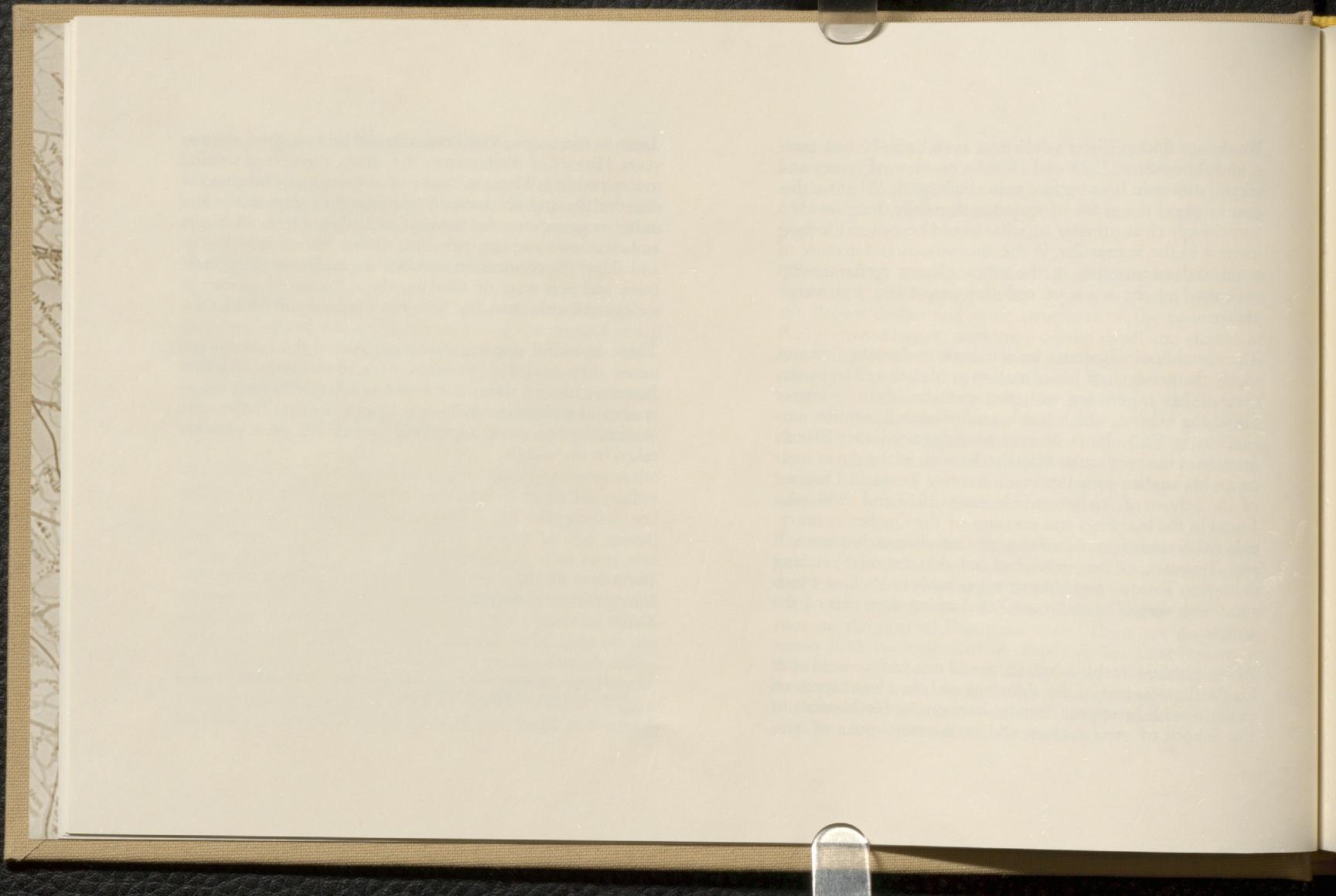
These beautiful drawings, with occasional dimensions and notes that read like snatches of conversations, confirm Bland's curiosity about the world and his determination to study and understand it. They celebrate the act of discovery in drawing but more importantly, reveal the great pleasure taken in the search.

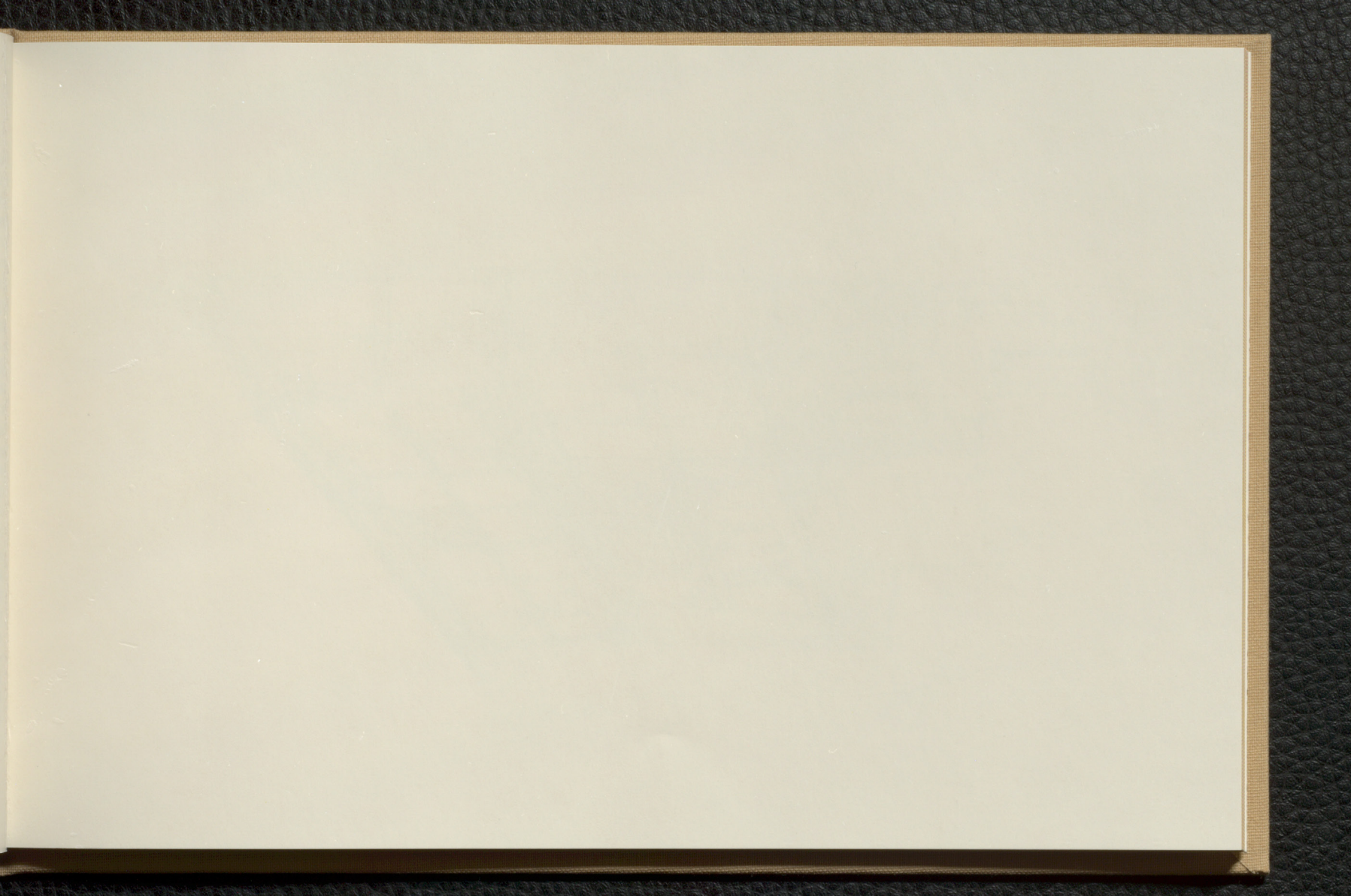
David Covo, FRAIC
Director, School of Architecture
McGill University

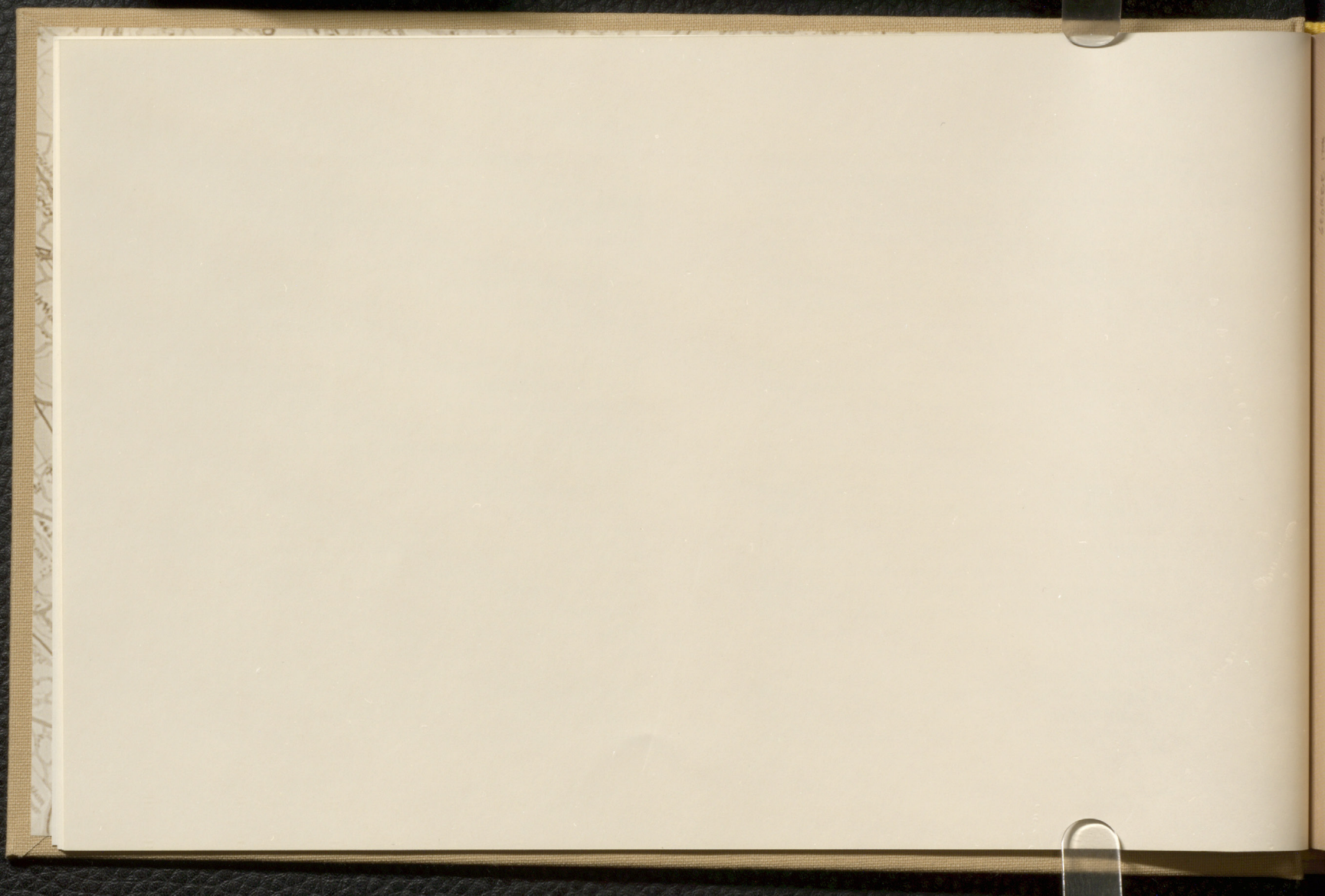
¹ Eugene Johnson, "Sketching Abroad", in *Drawn from the Source: The Travel Sketches of Louis I. Kahn* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996).

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

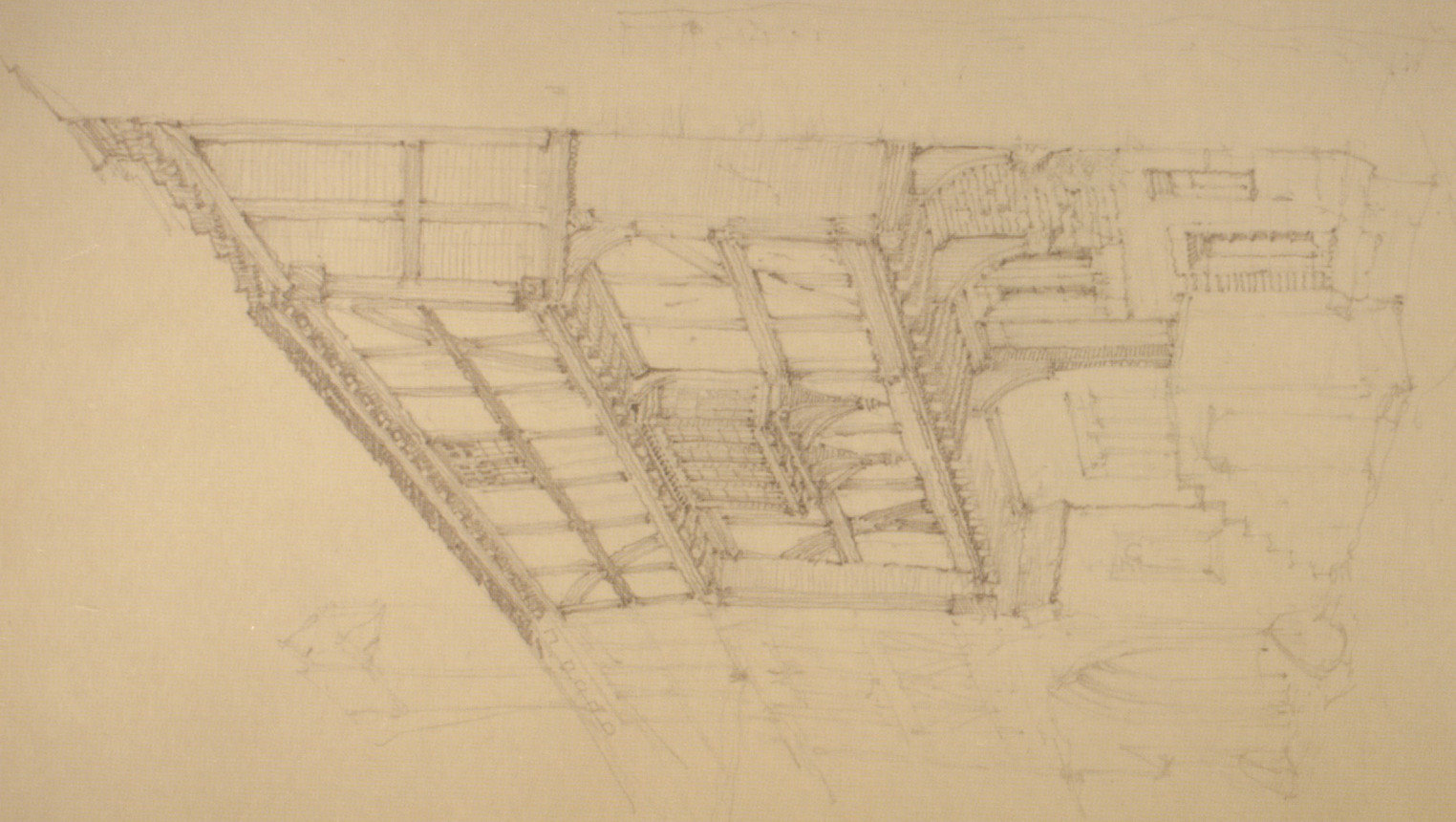


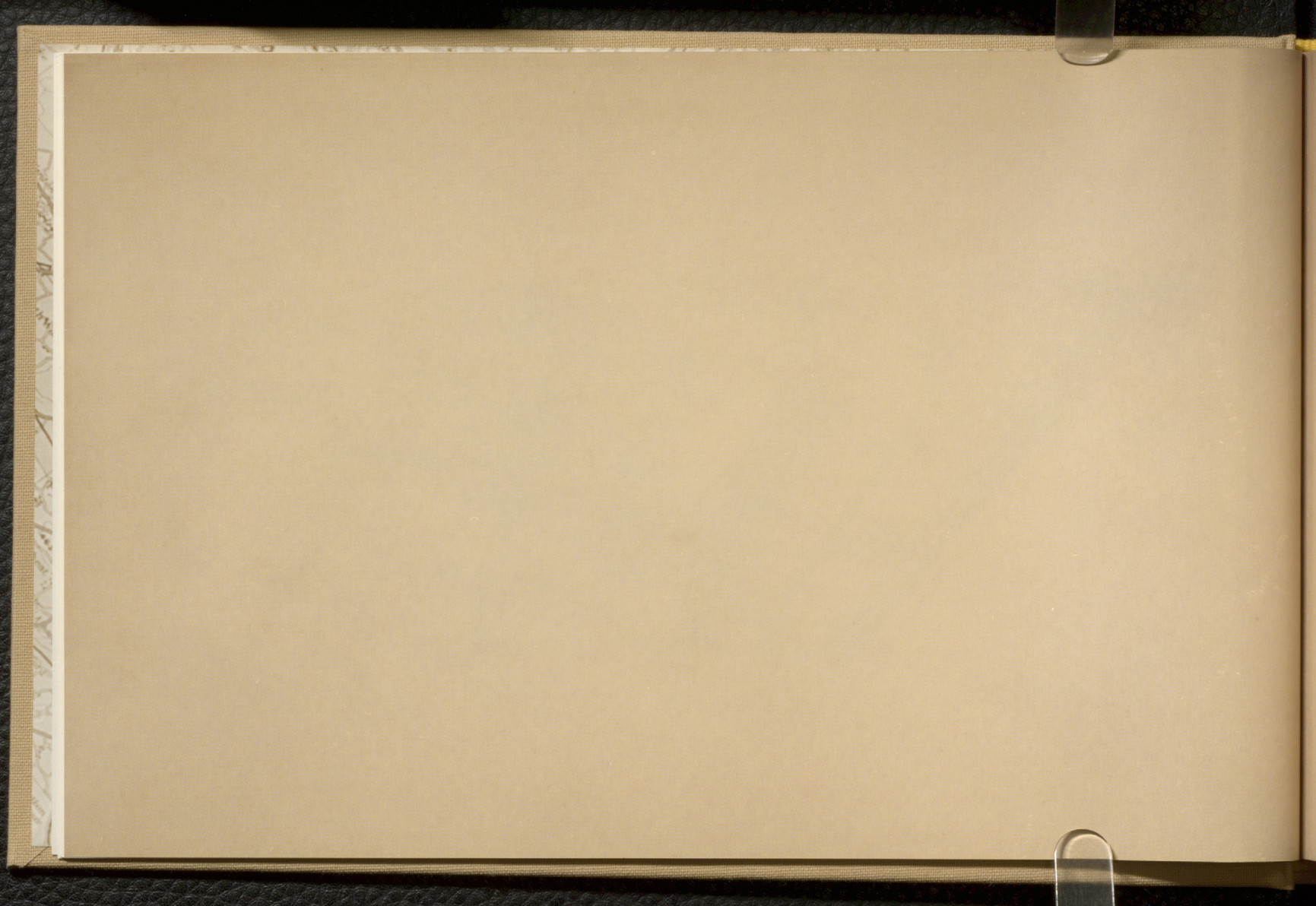


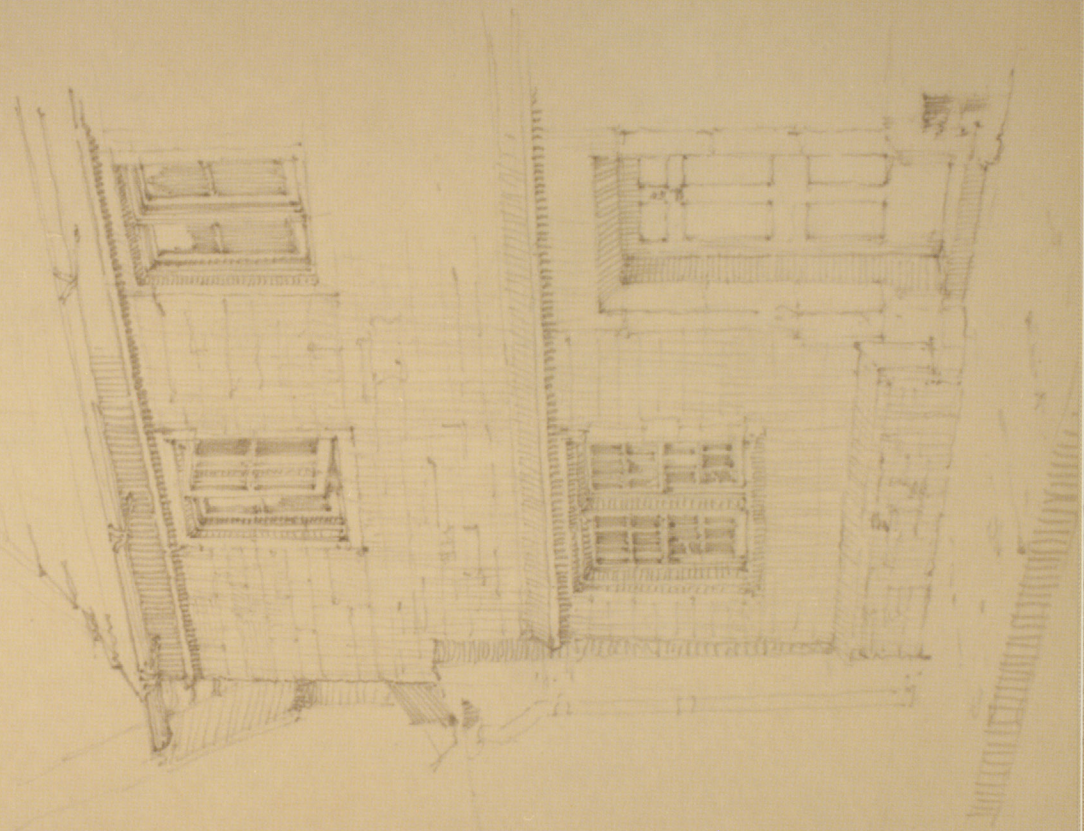


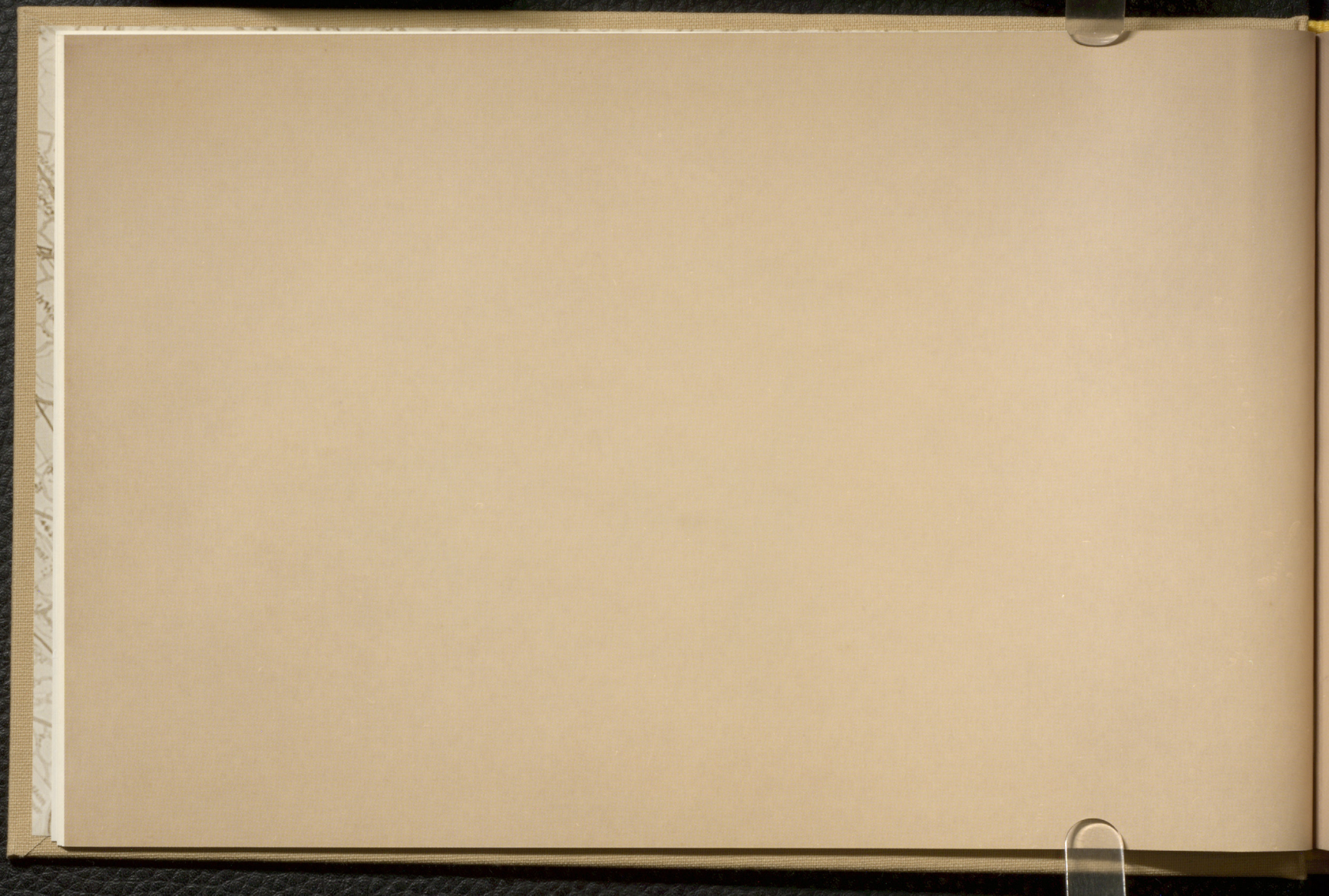
GEORGE INN

NORTH
ST PHILIP

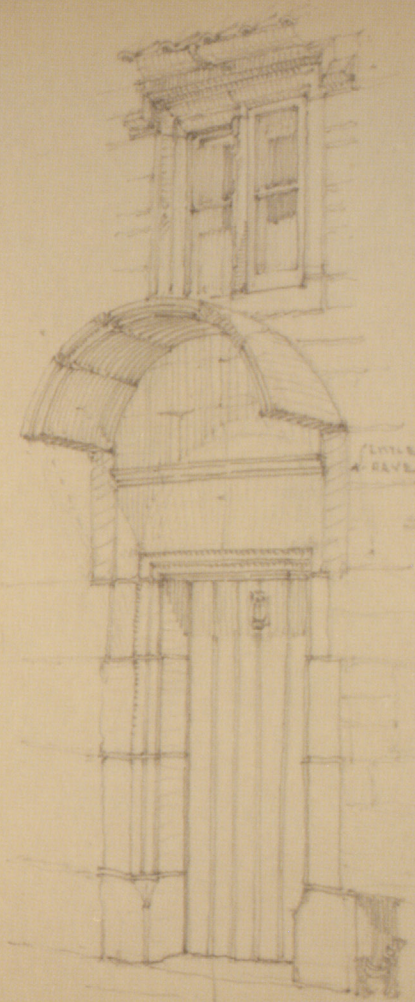
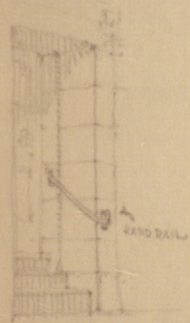




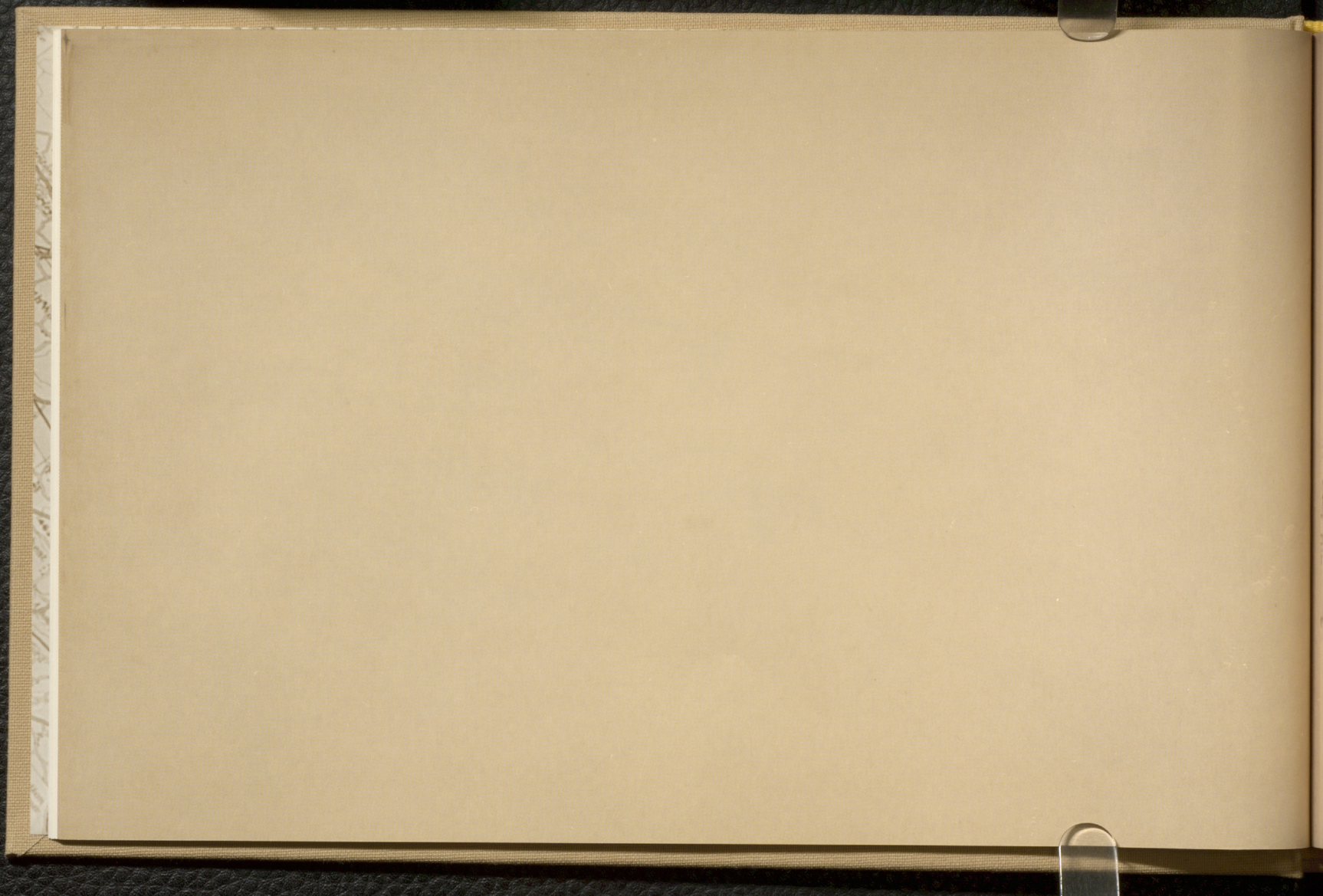


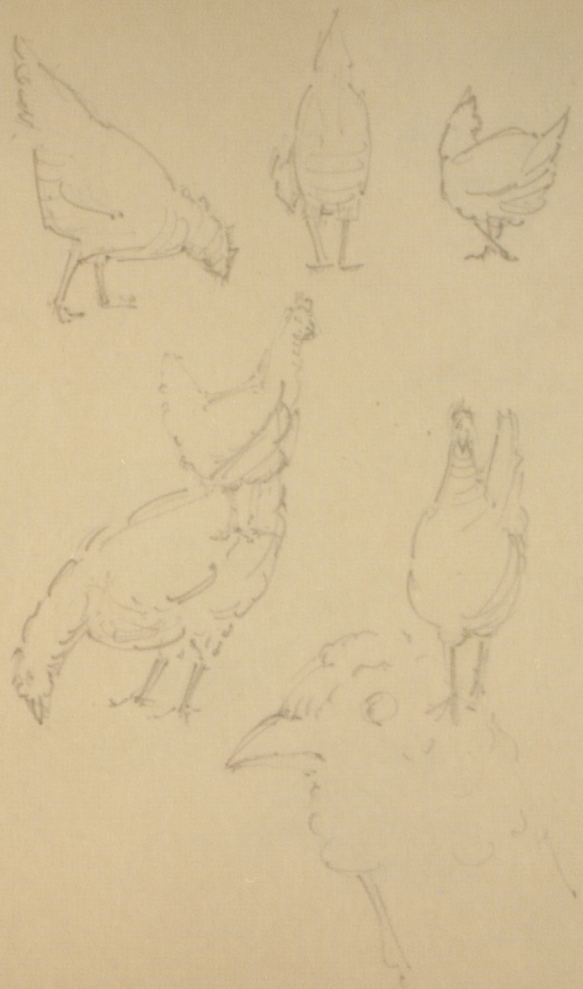


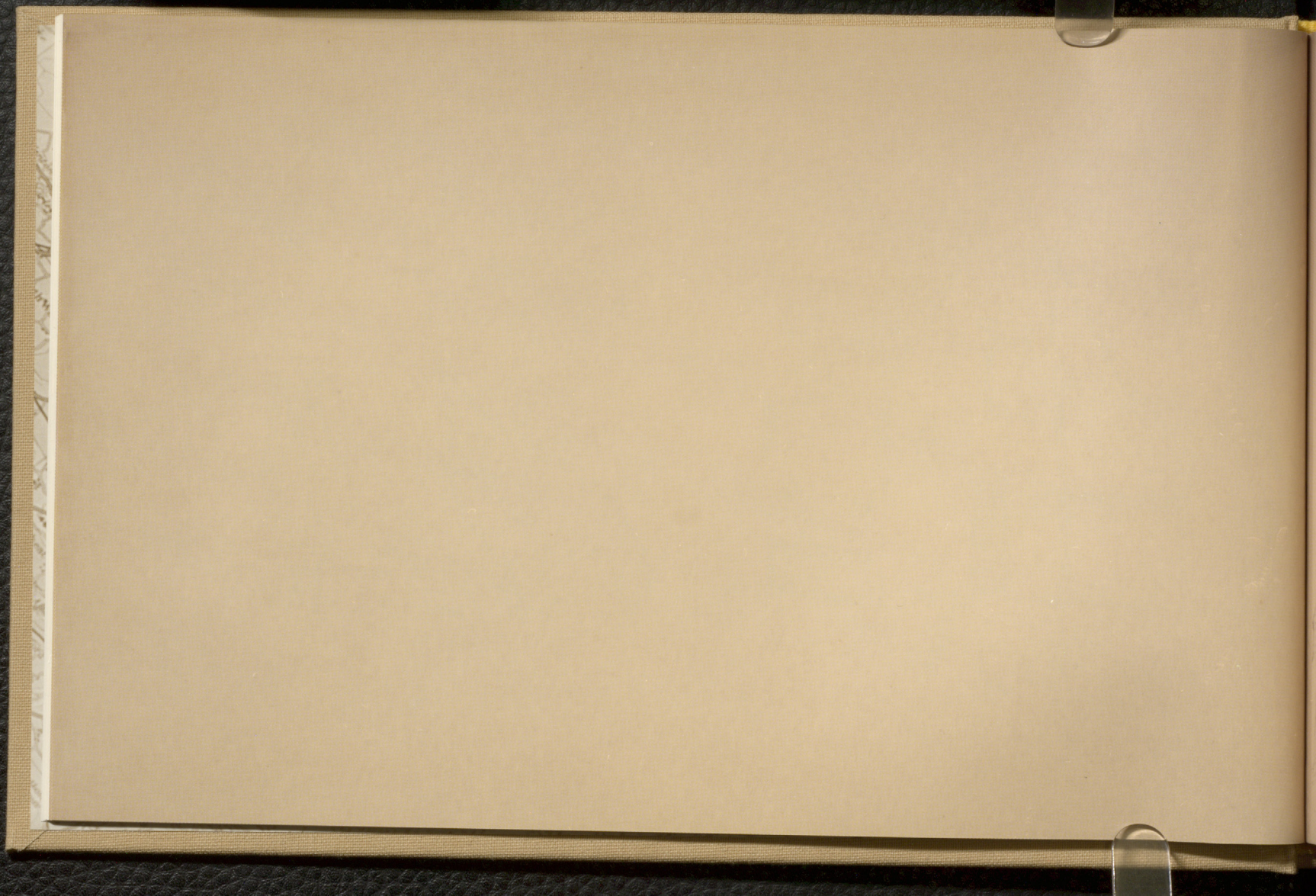
NORTON S.P

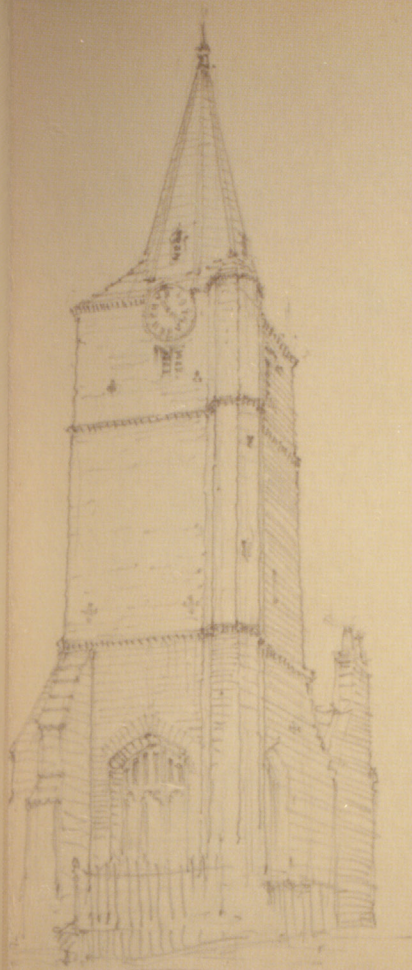


SMALL TRUSSES
HAVE BEEN OPEN





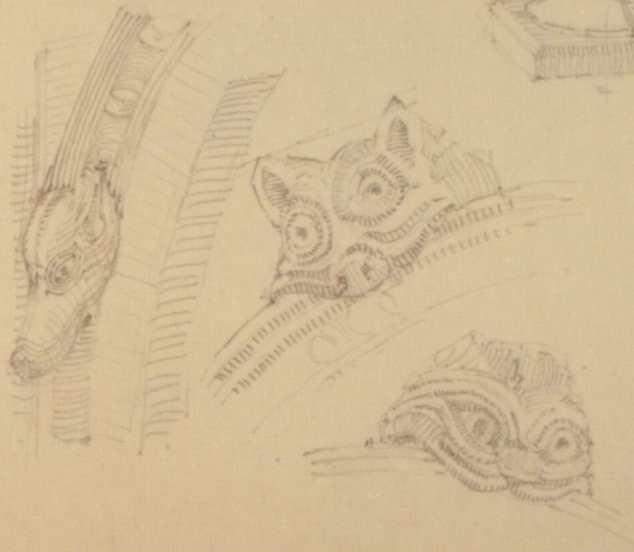
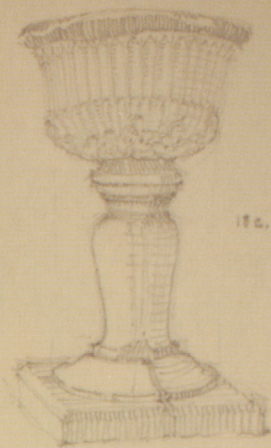


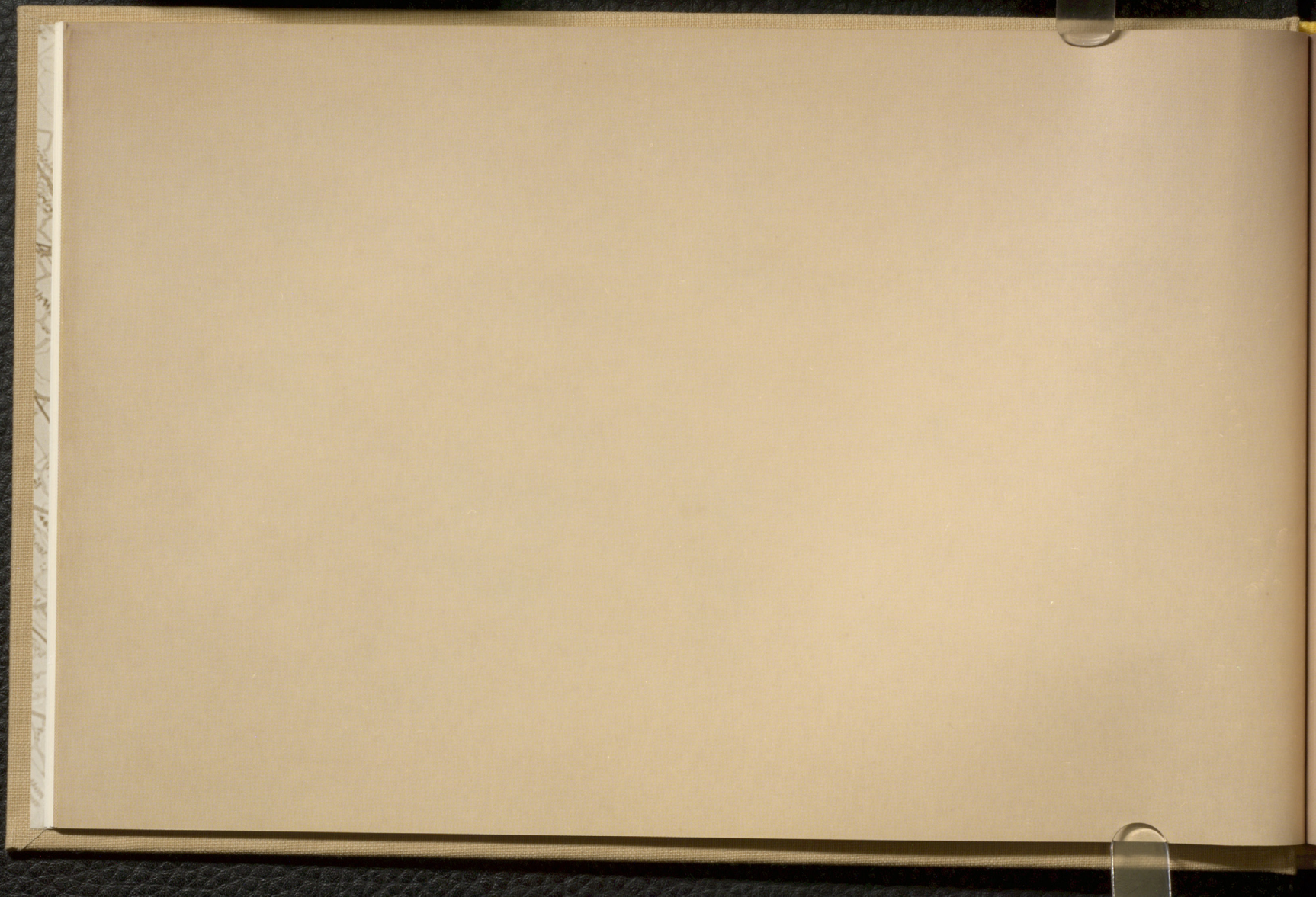


BELLTOWER, MALMESBY



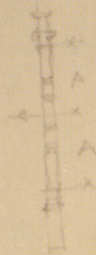
S. GOD. MALMESBY.





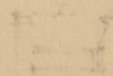
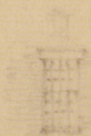


PULPIT.

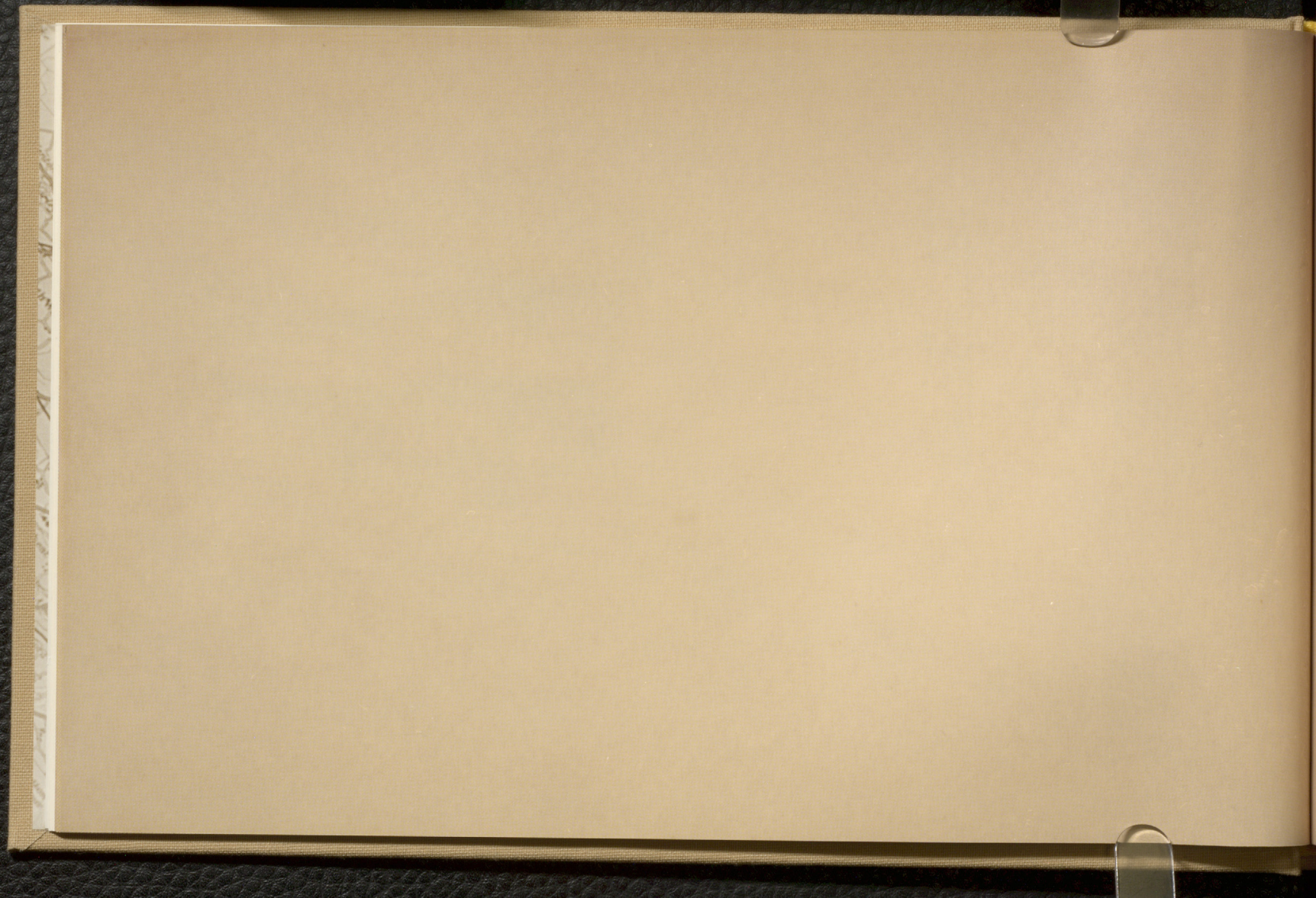


COLUMN

MALMESBURY



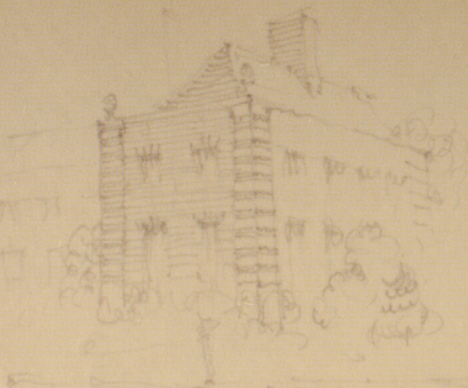
CRINCESTER



STORY SKETCHES.



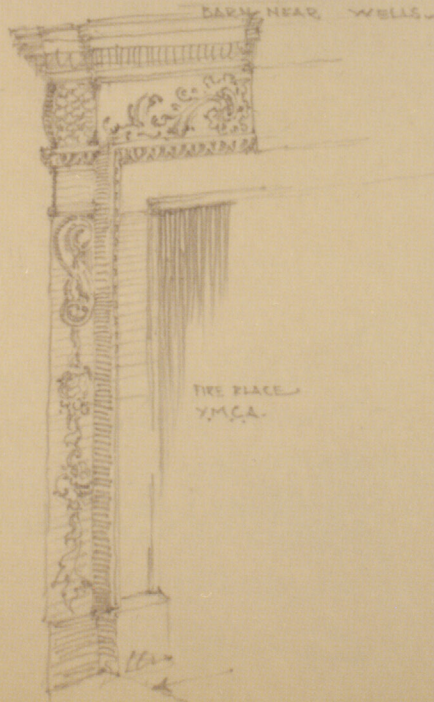
HOUSE NEAR CHARLTON



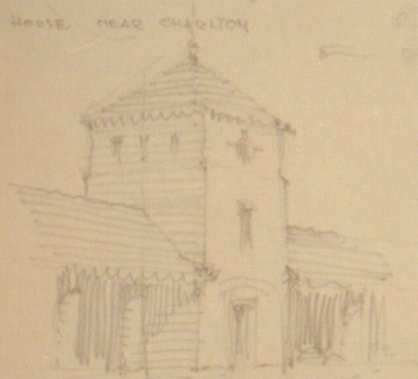
HOUSE NR MALMESBY.



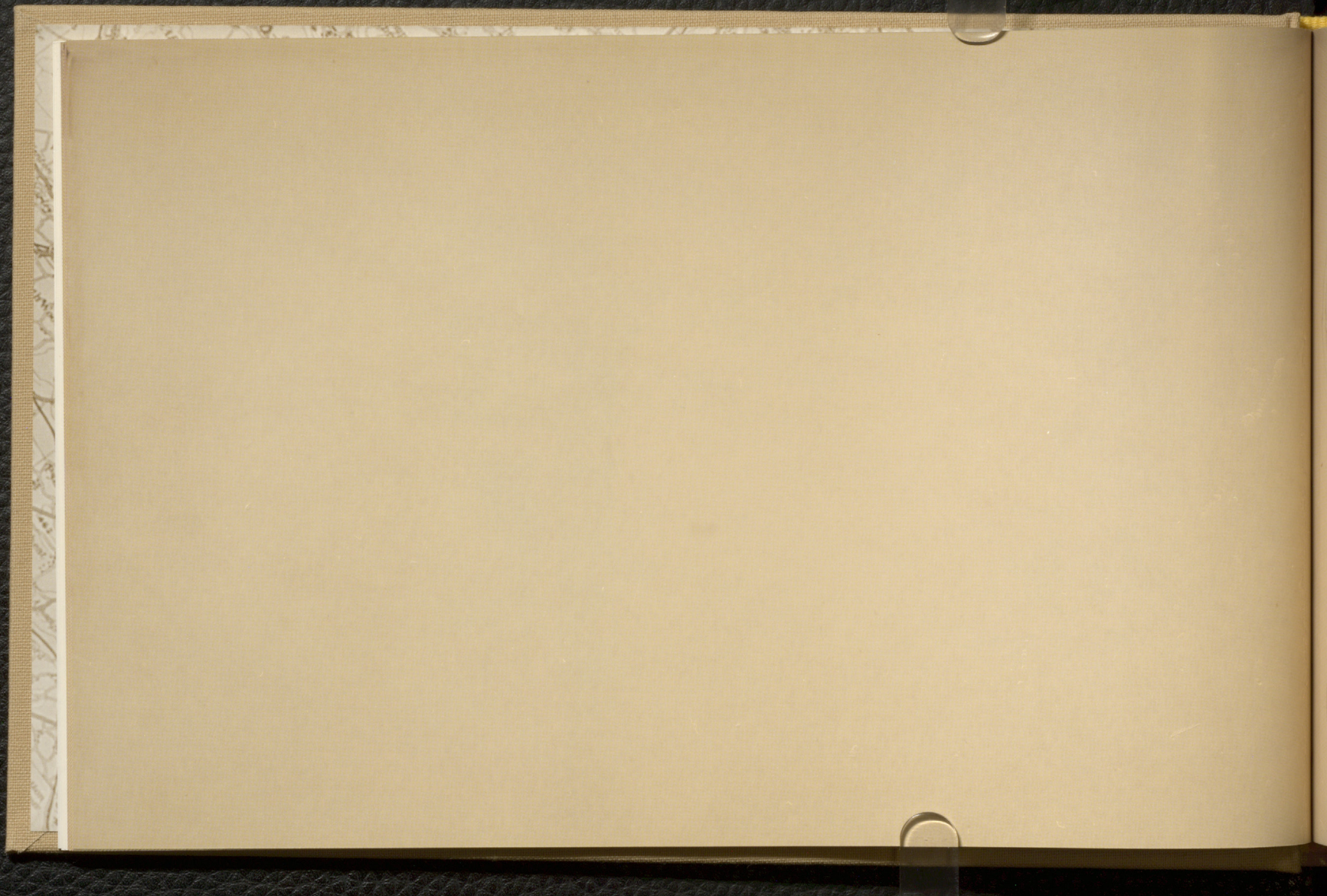
BARN NEAR WELLS.

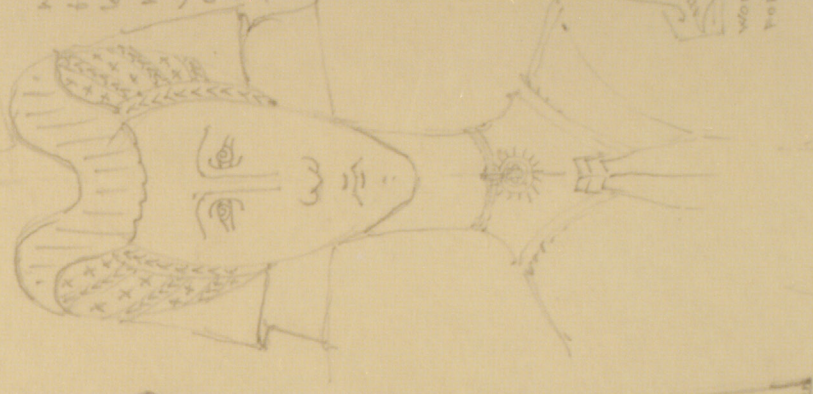
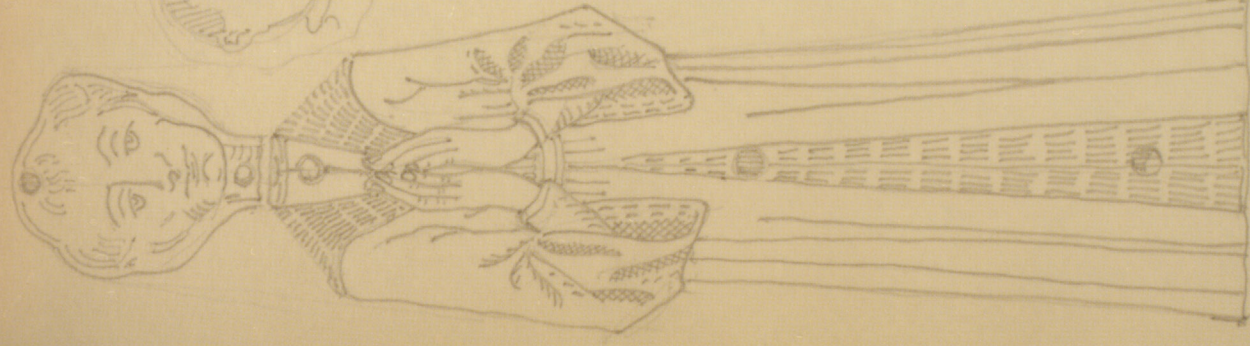


FIRE PLACE
Y.M.C.A.

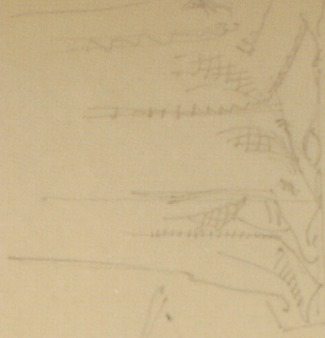
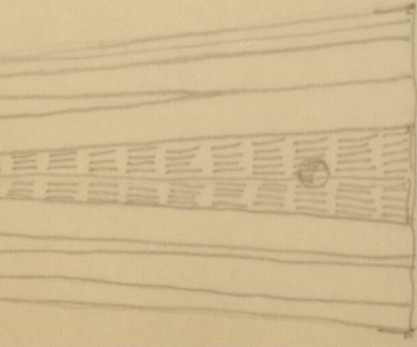


BARN YARD TOWER.





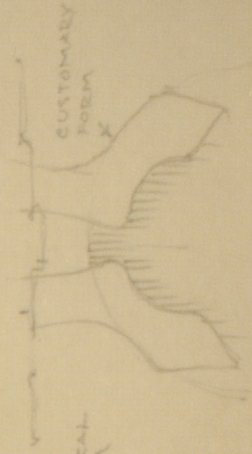
men have round
faces women have
long oval
male waist line is
while the female
waist line is
and part below the
heart



WOMENS GARMENTS END IN
FOLDS CONCEALING FEET

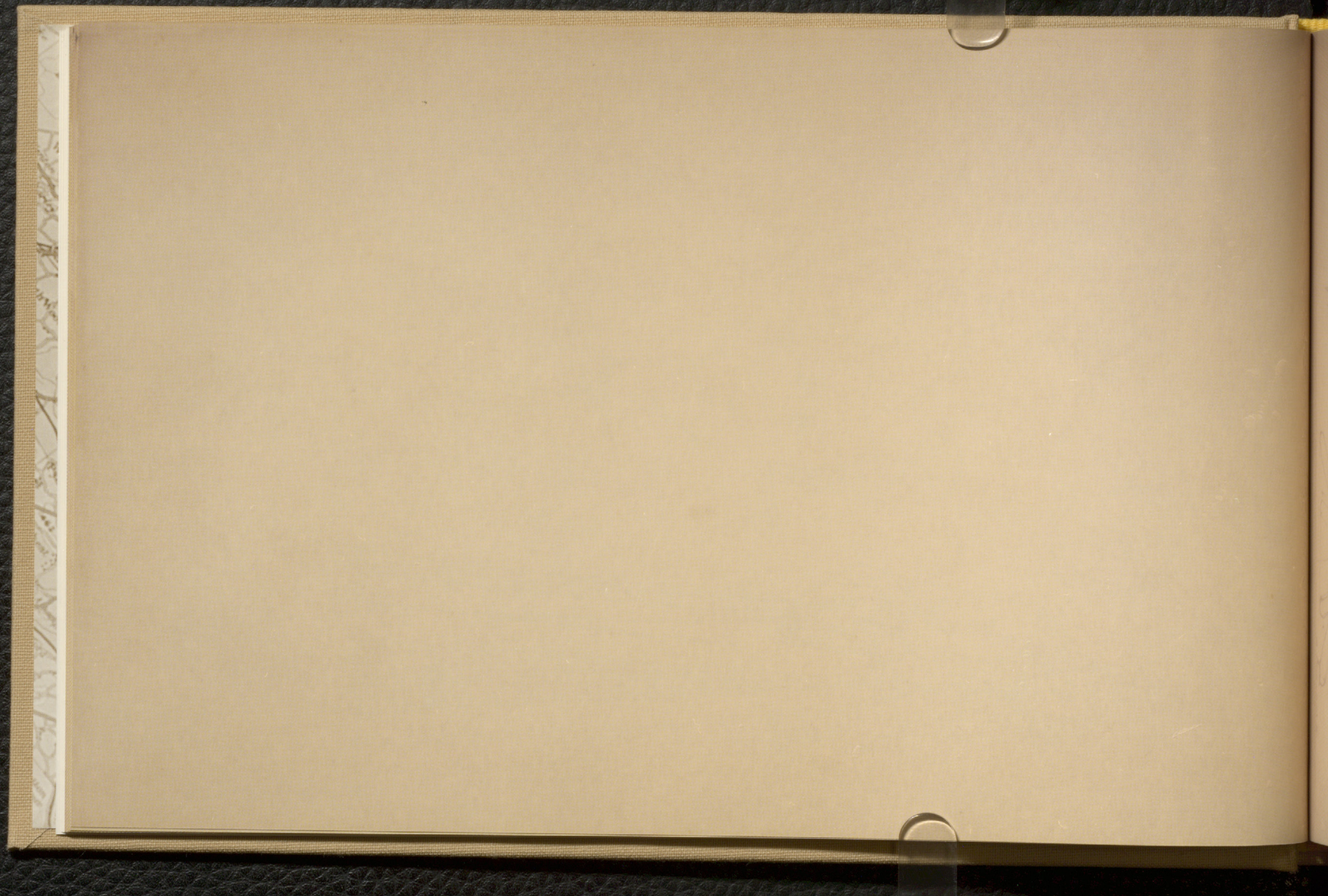


CLERICAL
FORM



CUSTOMARY
FORM

MALE FEET SHOWN

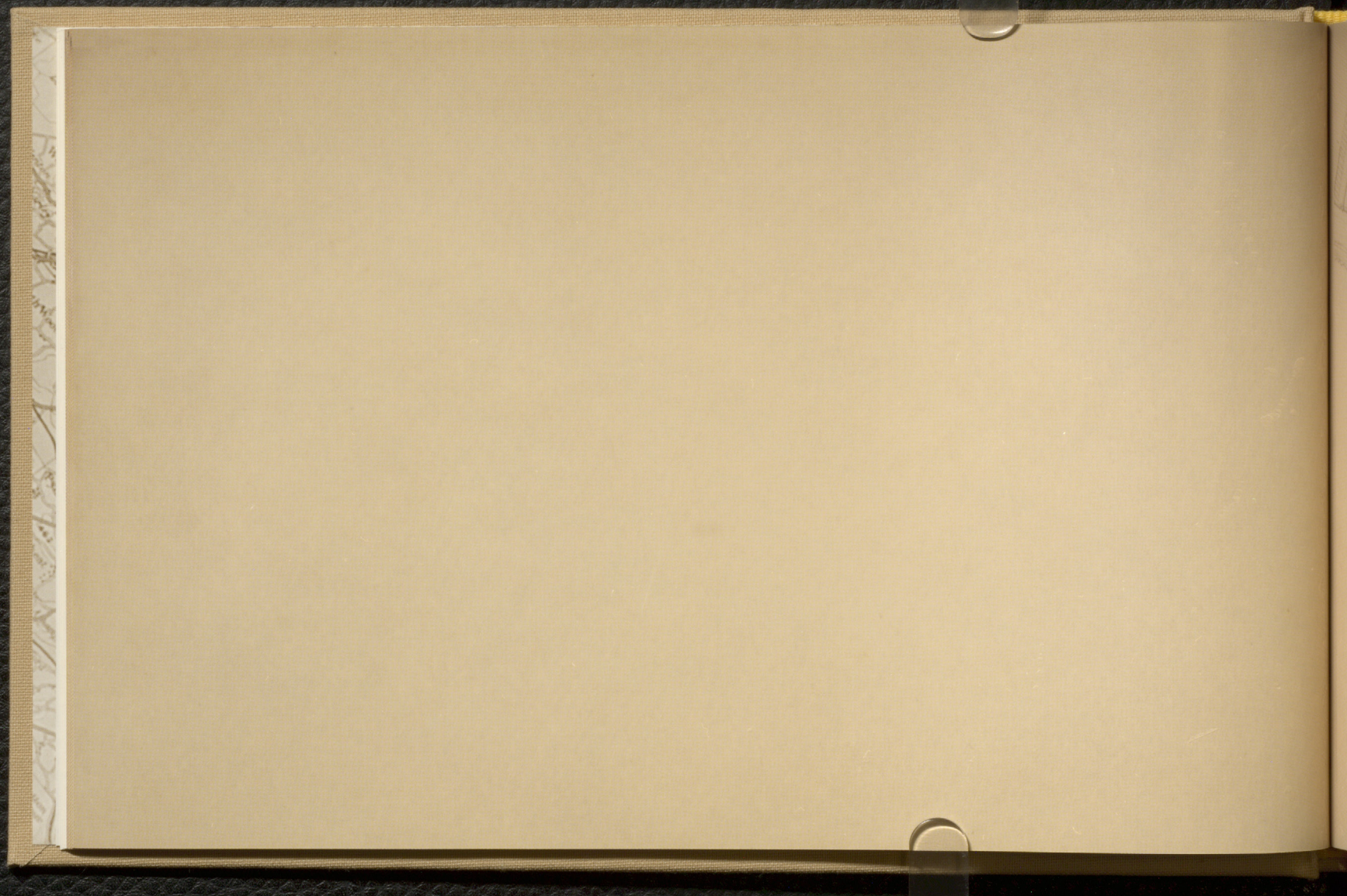


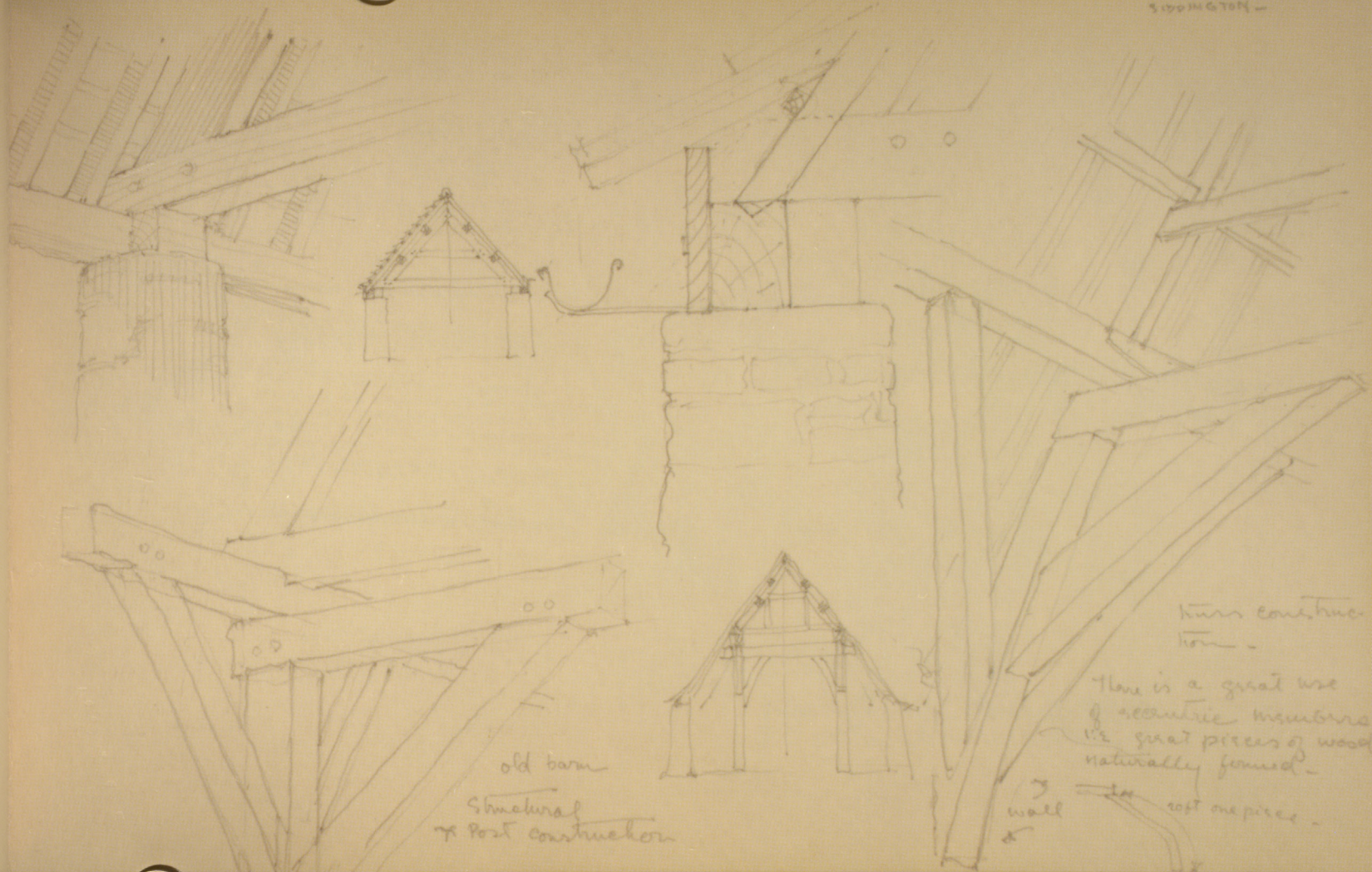


showing all done with
 D honey coloured thread outline
 where one part is shown above
 another a black thread is used
 as well

The face and hair is shown
 in black. the frattens on the
 underside of the wings also.
 The inscription was in black
 letters.

The pattern indication on
 the part, done in gold
 is not shown but
 isolated - the stems to
 something under -
 with.





old barn

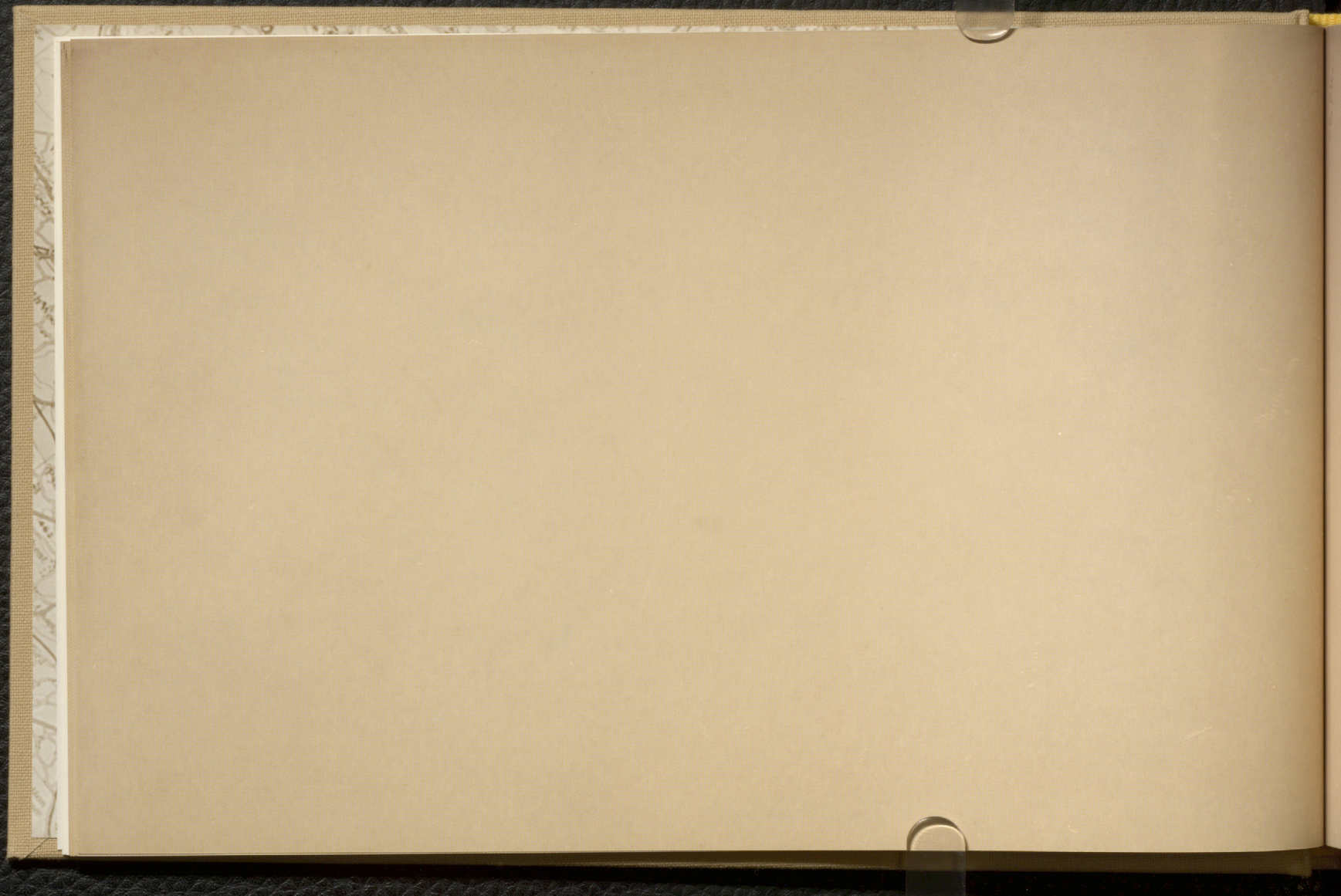
Structural
Post construction

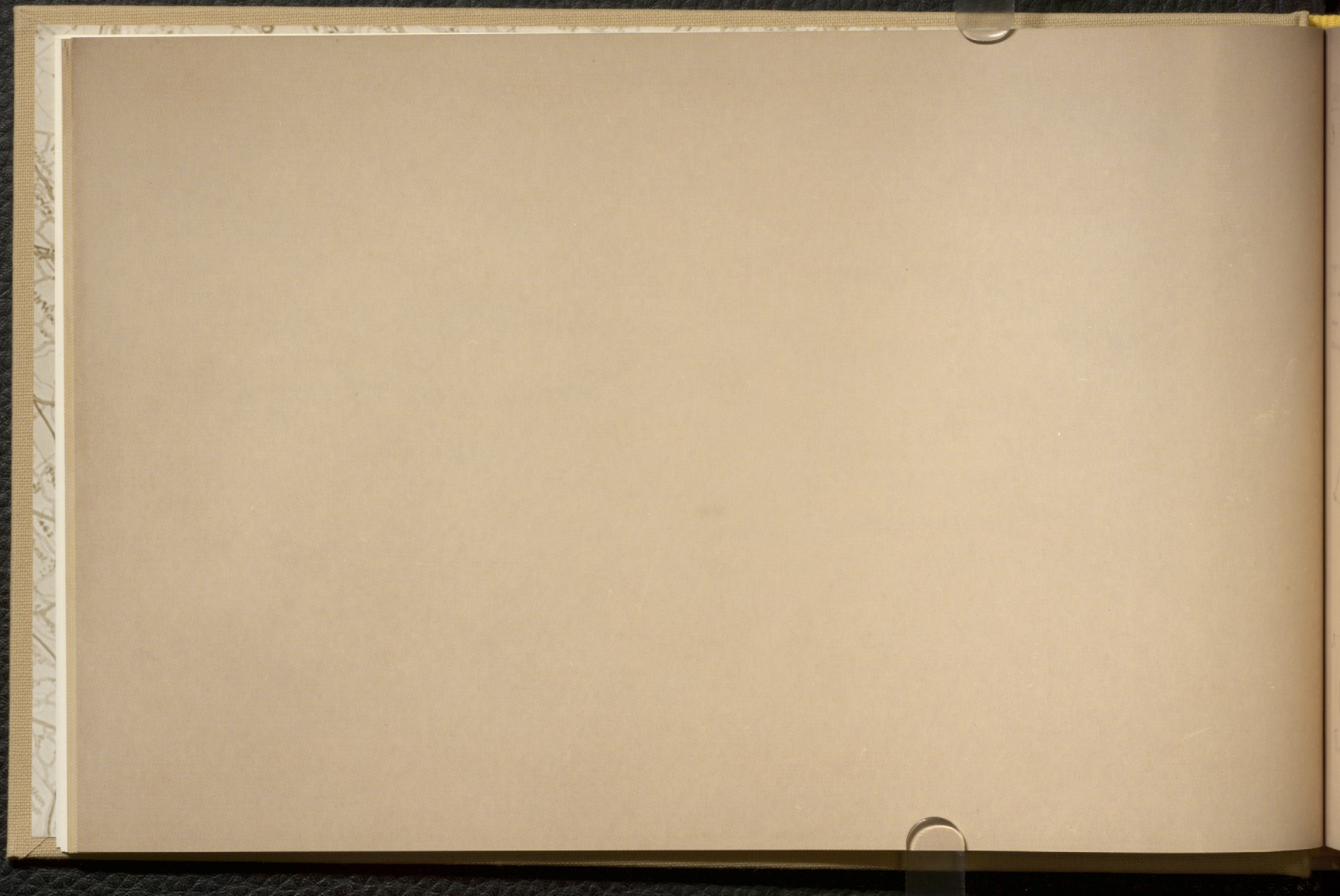
turn construction -

There is a great use
of eccentric members
i.e. great pieces of wood
naturally formed -

3
wall

cost one piece -



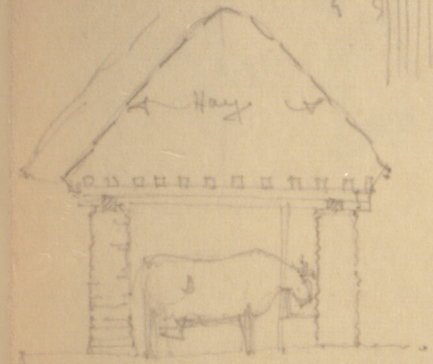


1114

8 11

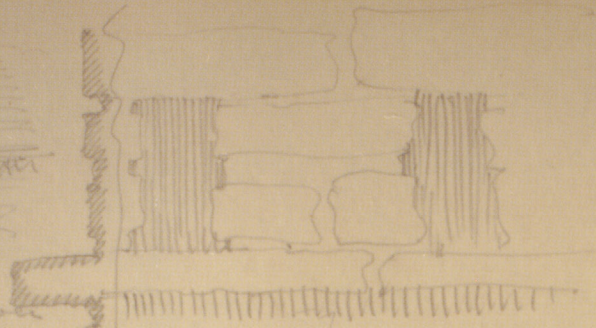


low col.
valley in gable over
in door - but sometimes
small barn gables.



low stone walls should always

be at corners, never
it is better practically on
both sides and far superior

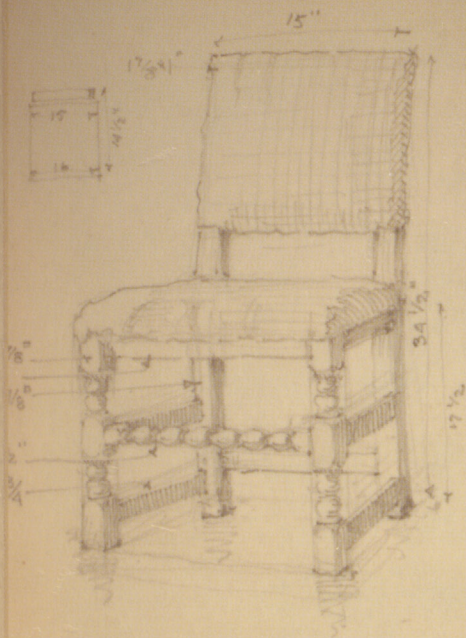


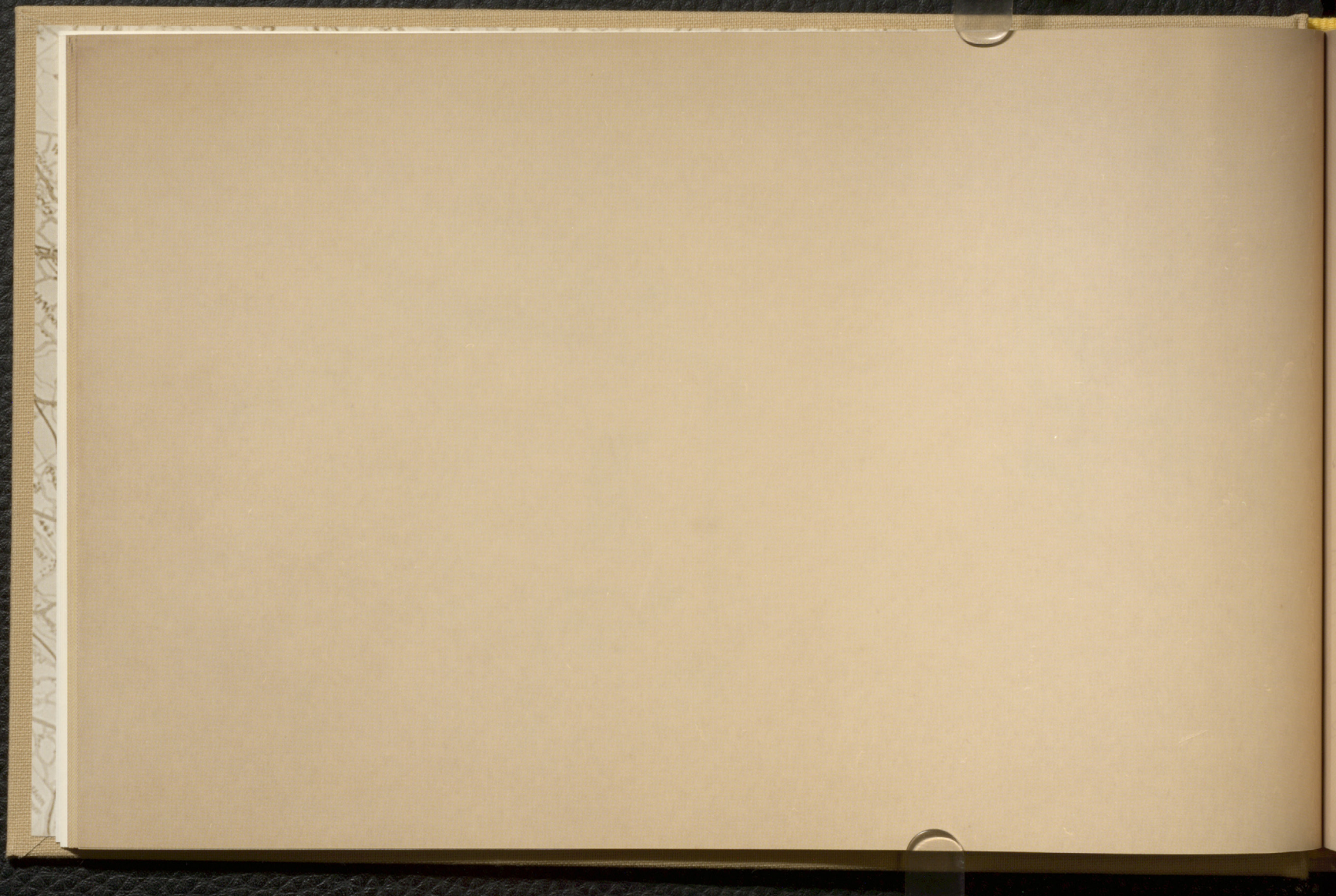
it is kind of barn gable
may come from the thatch
four



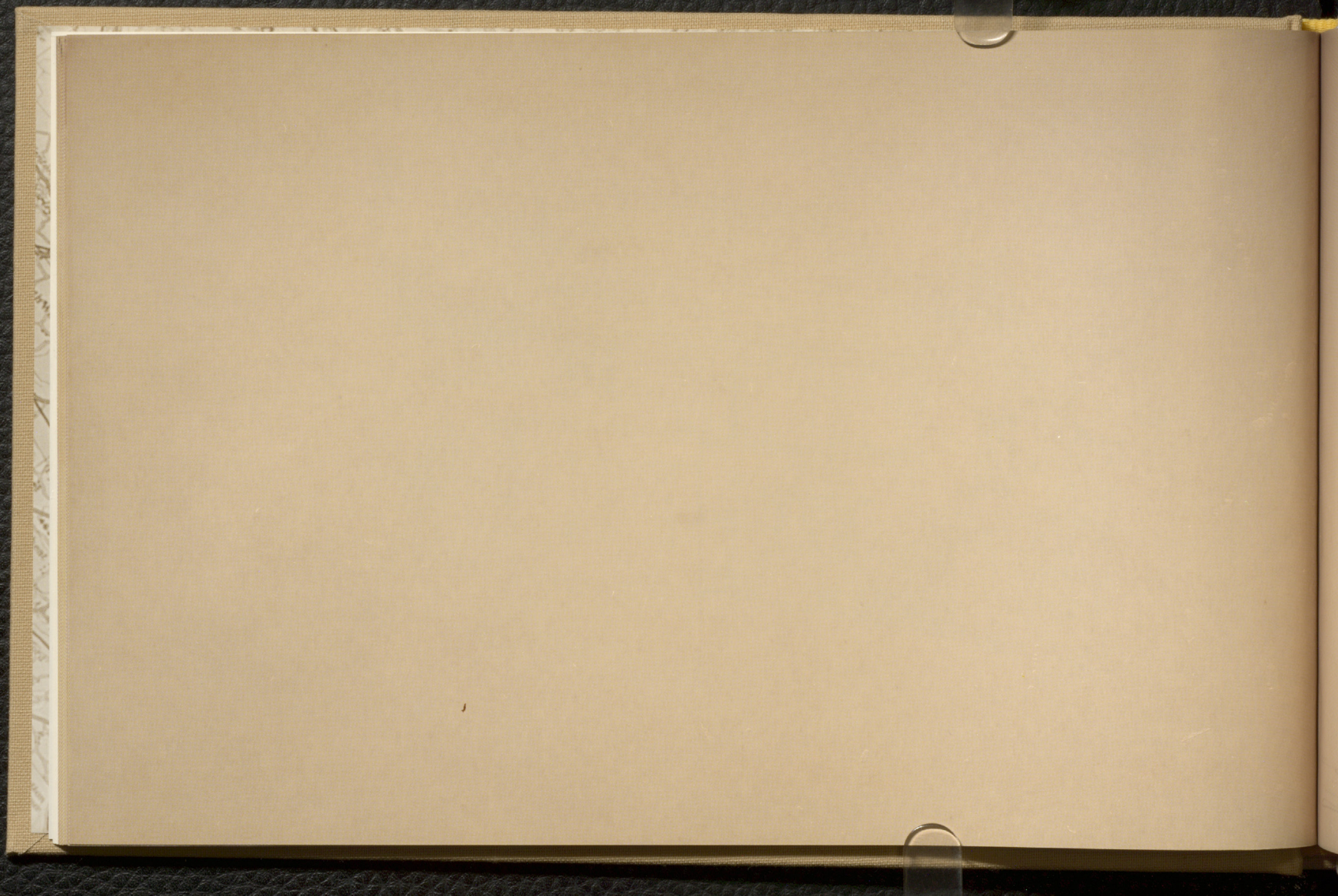
AMPNEY CAVES

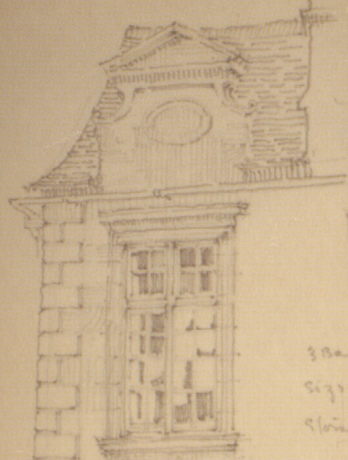




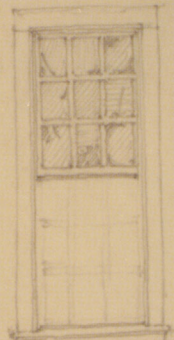


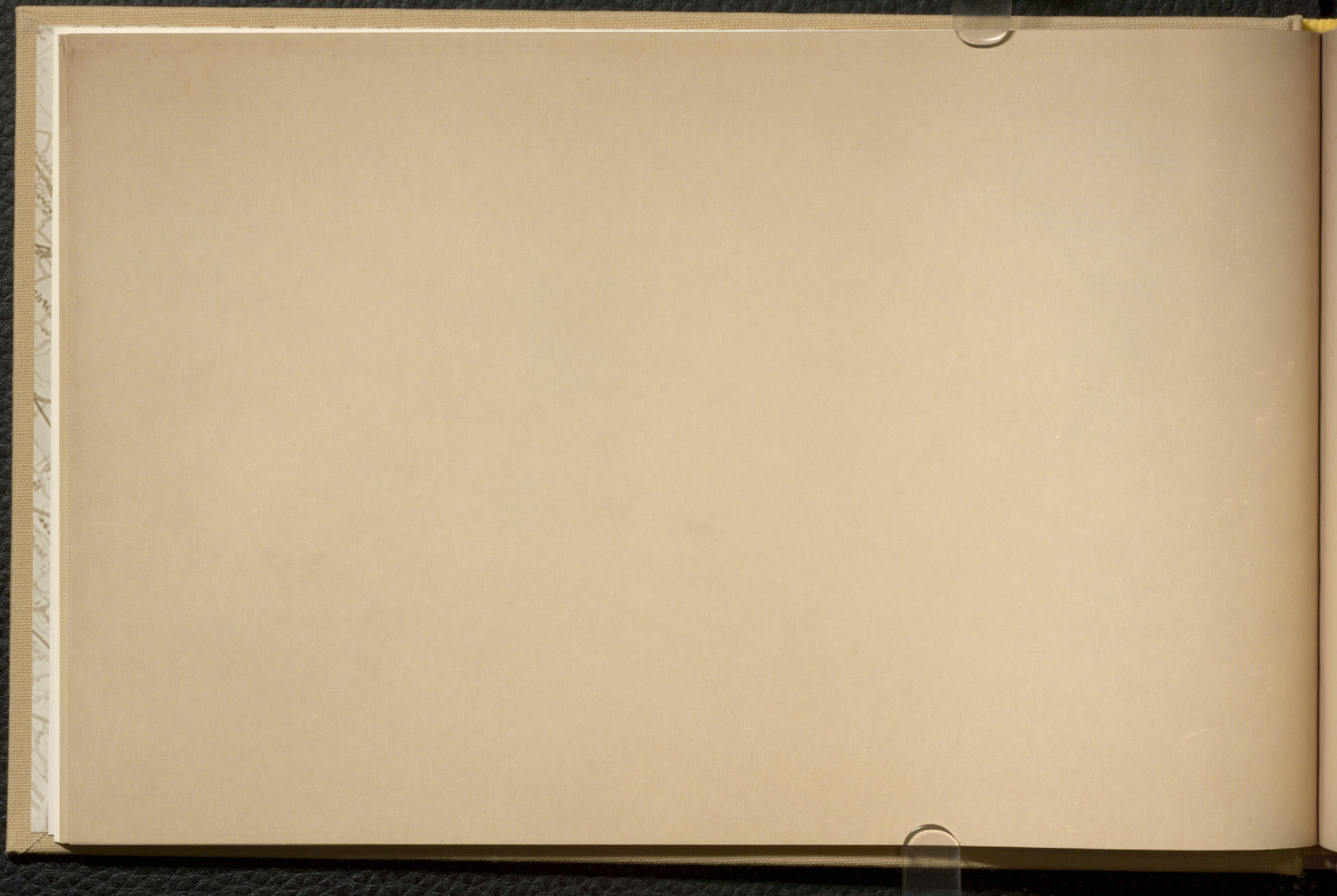


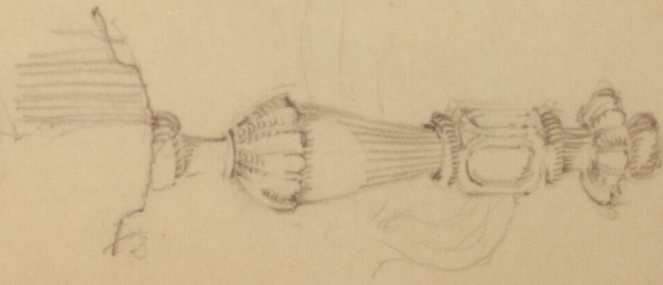
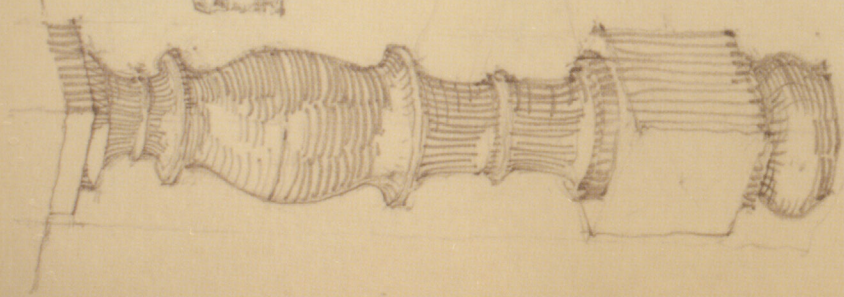
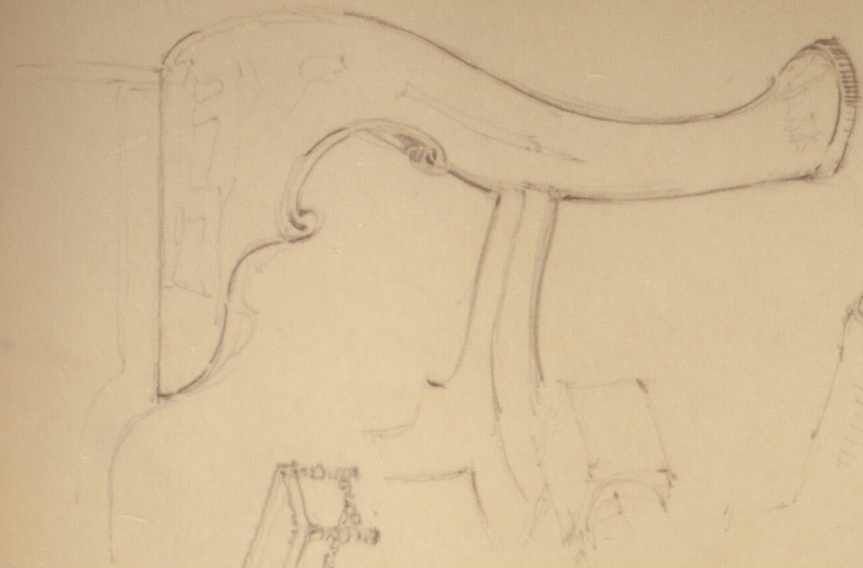




3 bays -
size of glass - $9\frac{1}{2} \times 11\frac{1}{4}$
stone course. 8 - 10-11







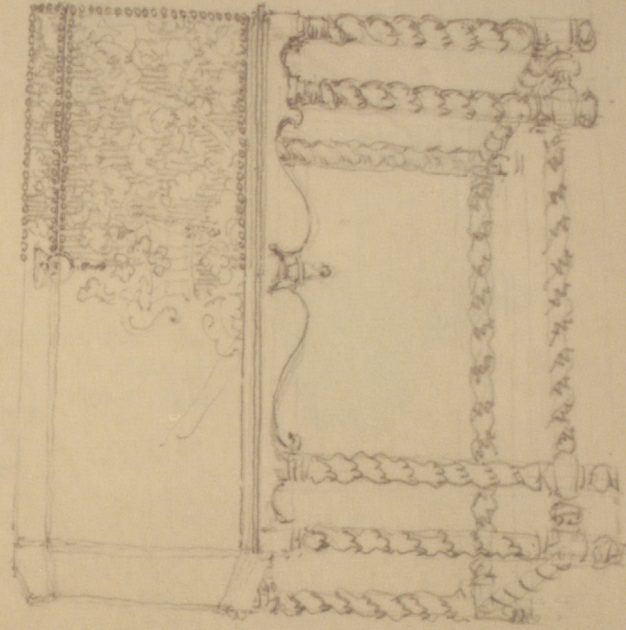




Foot
Composite.
1651
V & A



Composite.
Foot 1651
V & A.



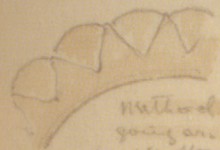




stem

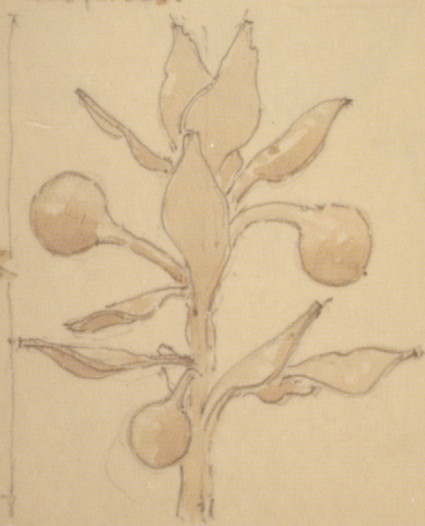


flamingo
V. 4. 100



water lily
going on a circle
with flat base.

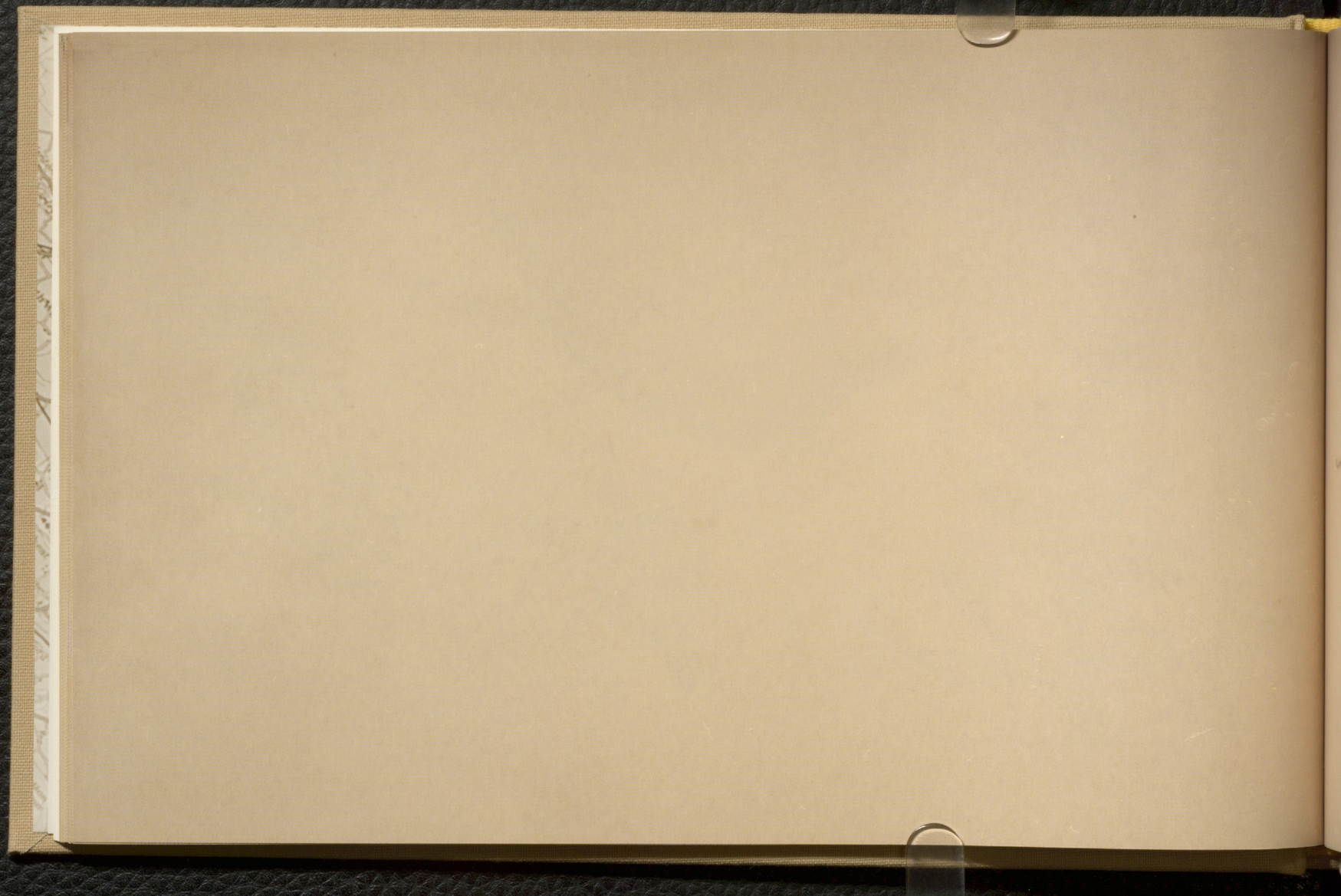
leaves
and
V. 4. 100



simple decoration
in the design
a round base



down to the
base





water cock
→

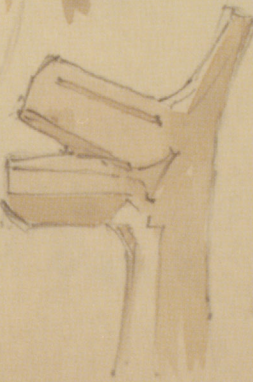


FL

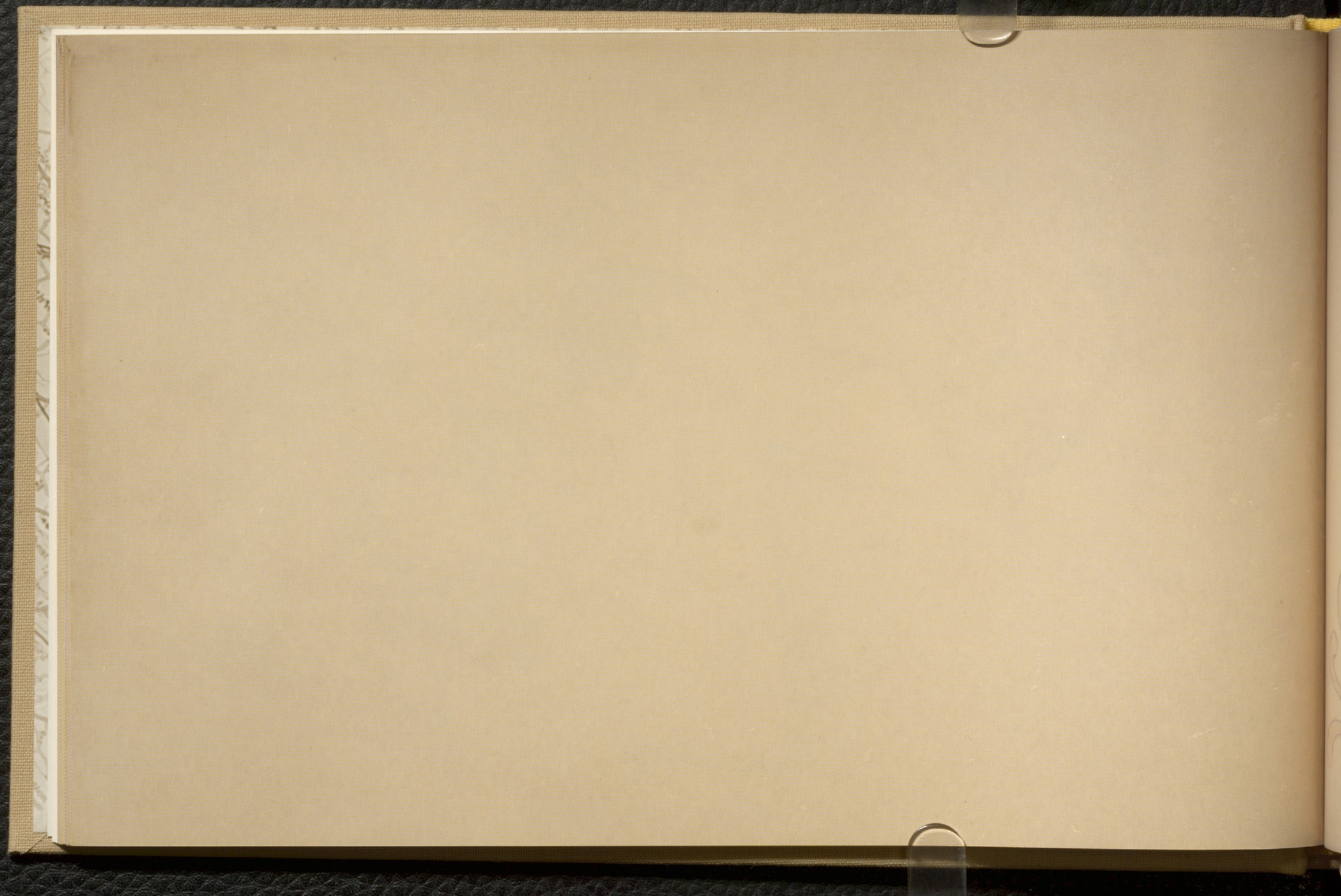
any box
VEAD

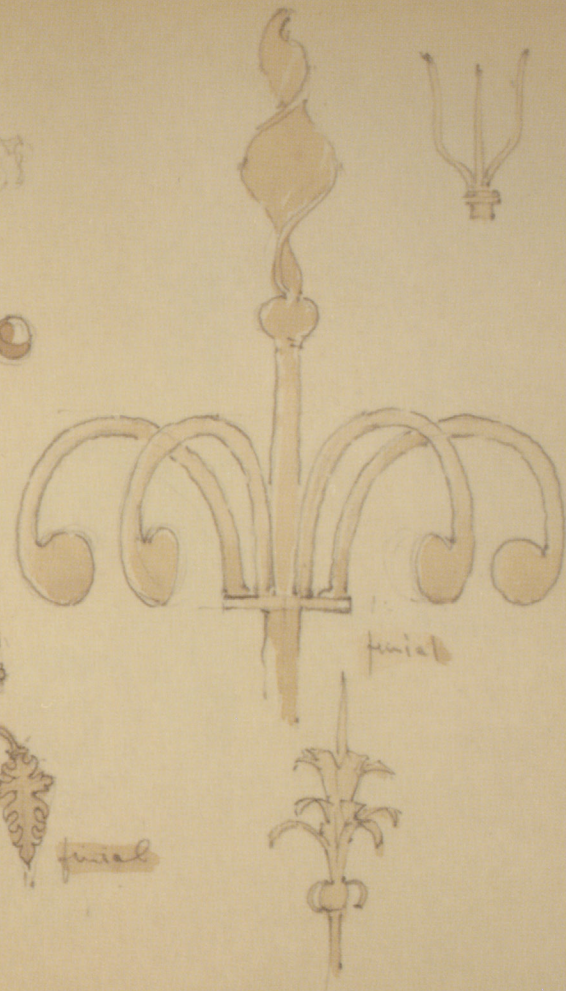


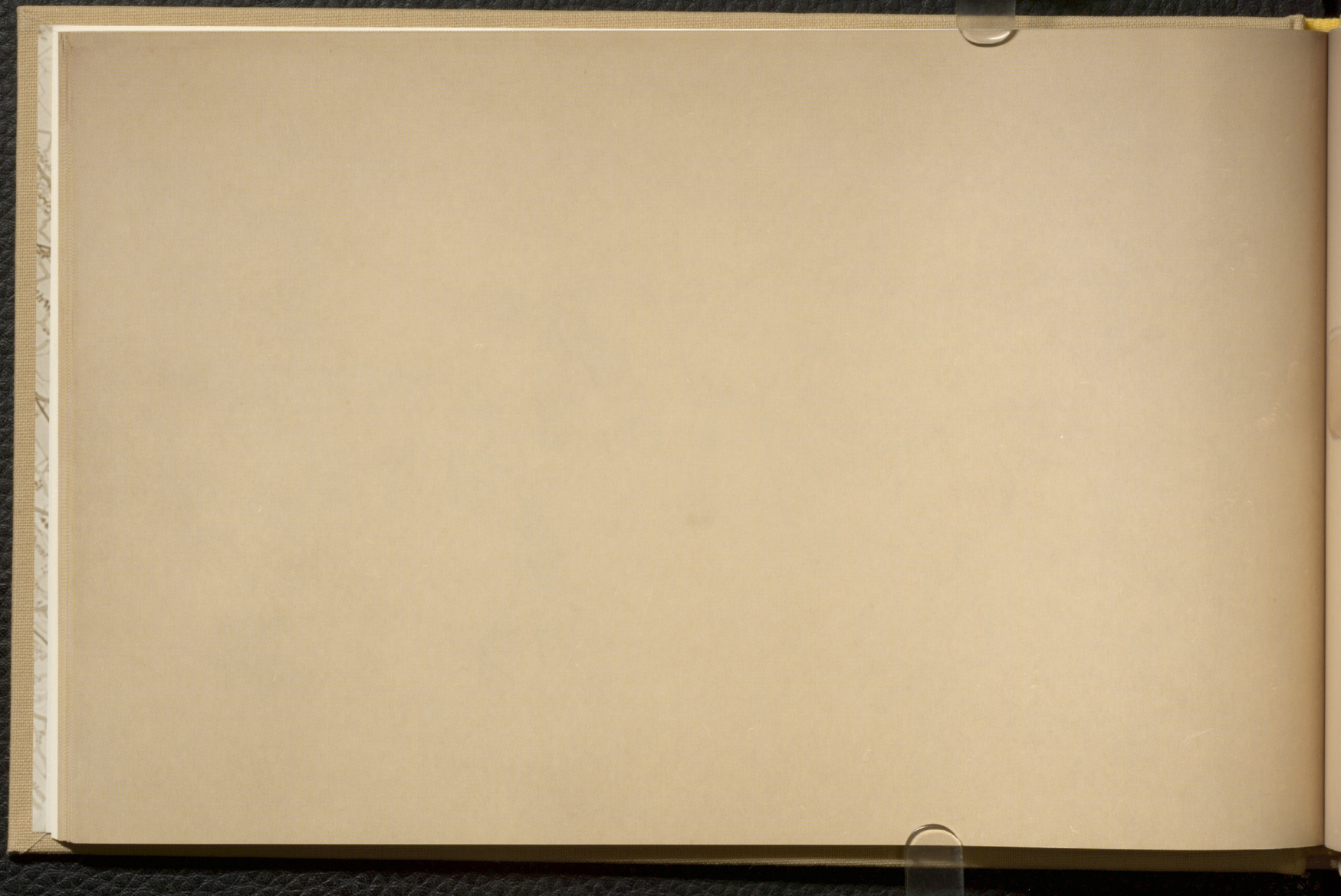
BULK HEAD
VA

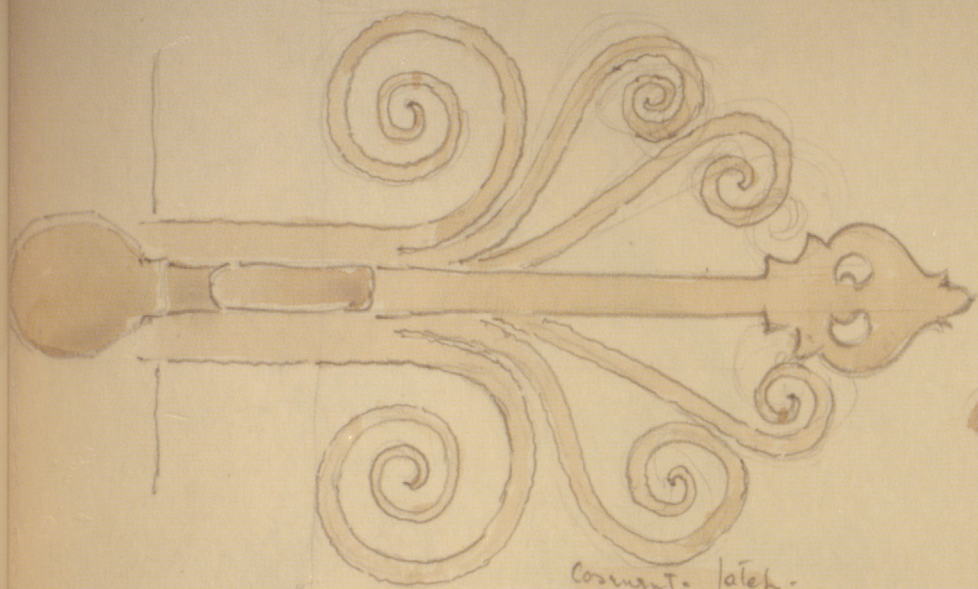


BRACKETS





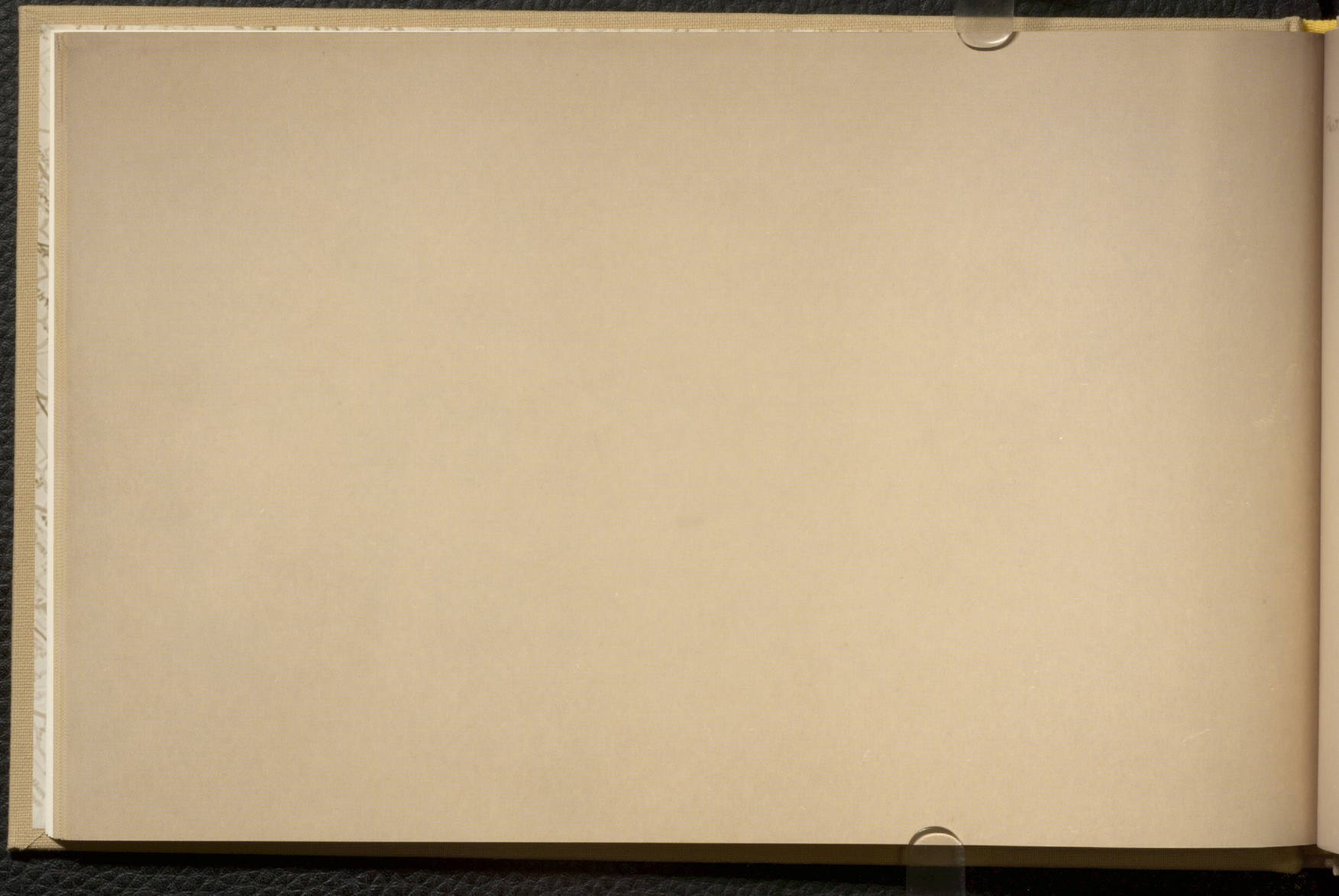


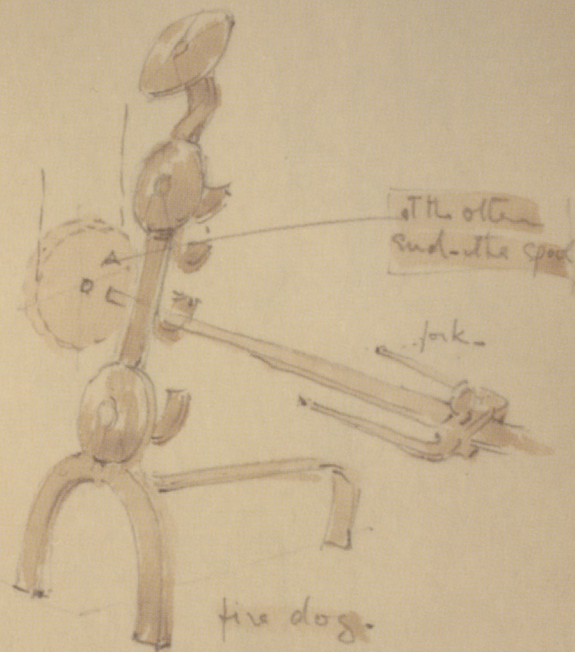
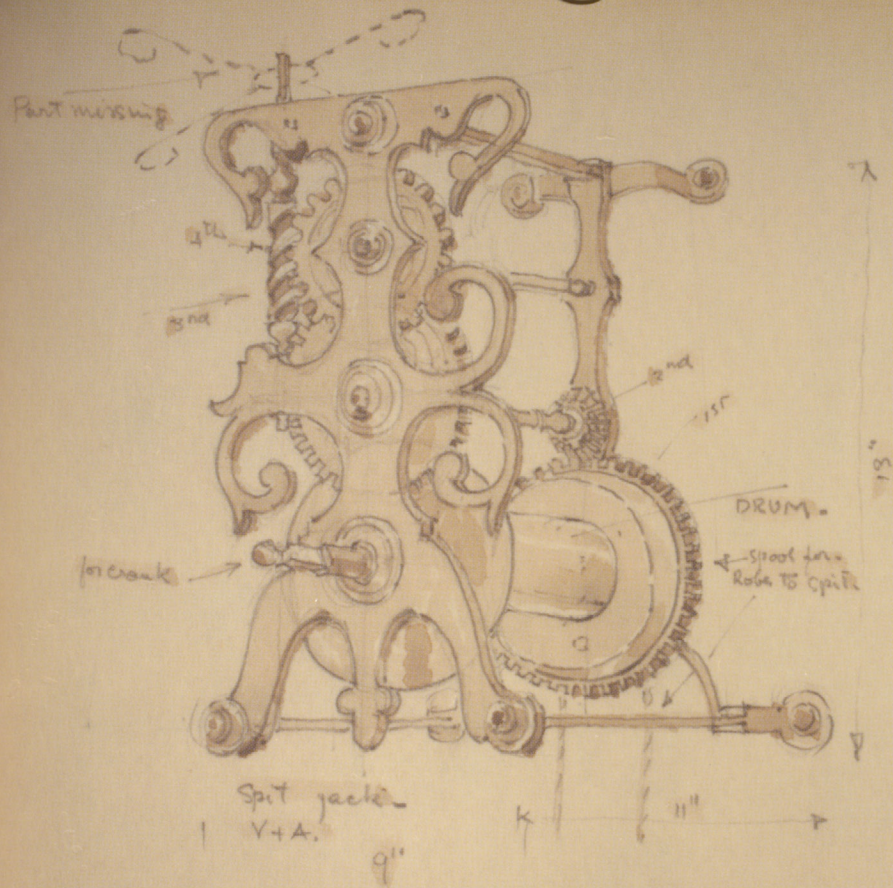


Cosmanto. lateh.

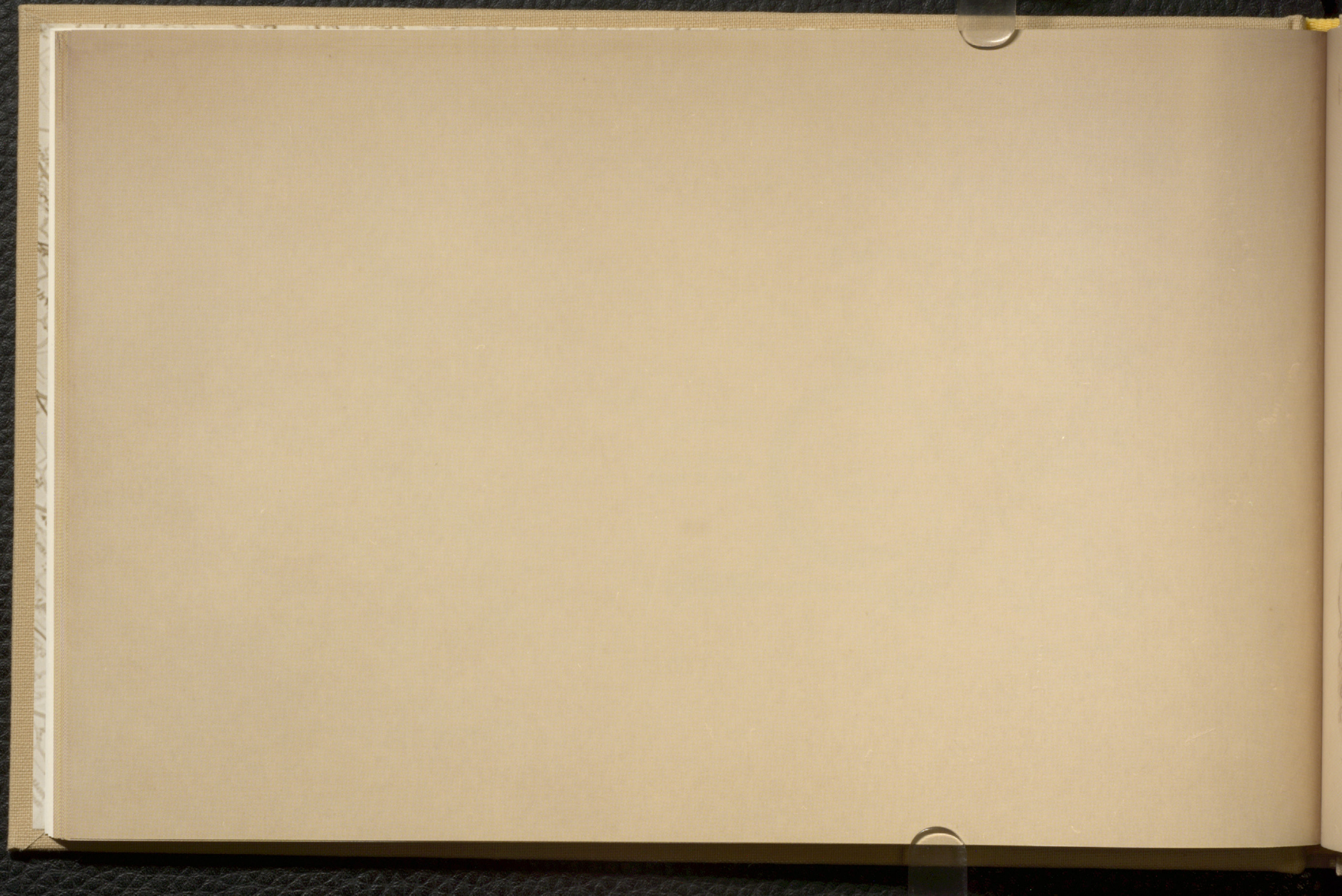


Cosmanto pulla





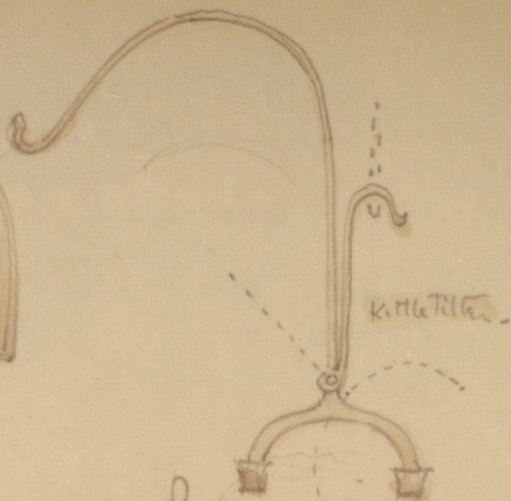
in this heart there dogs are
just used for the spit



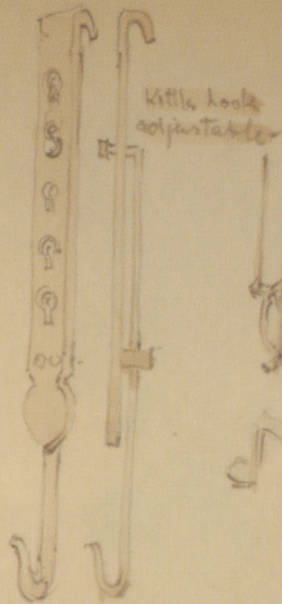
fireplace metal work.



toaster



kettle hanger



kettle hook
adjustable

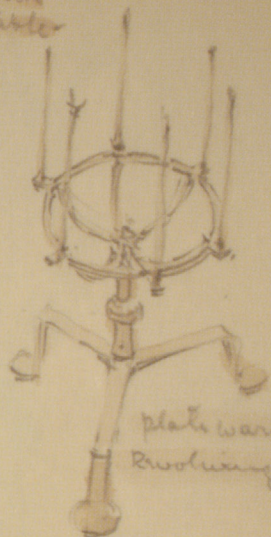
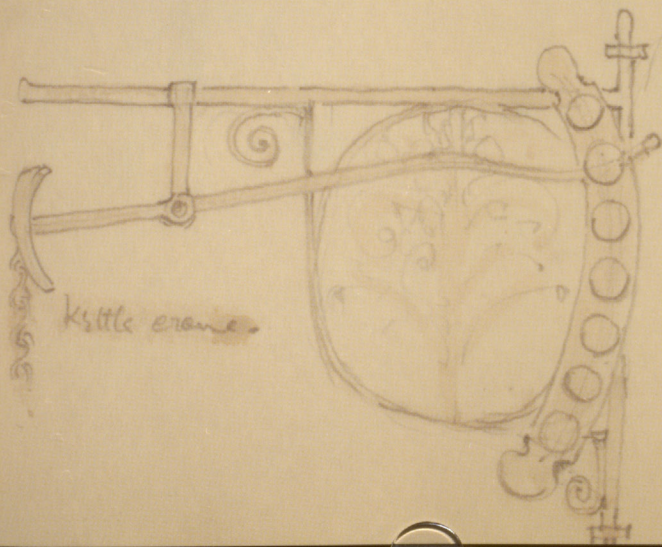
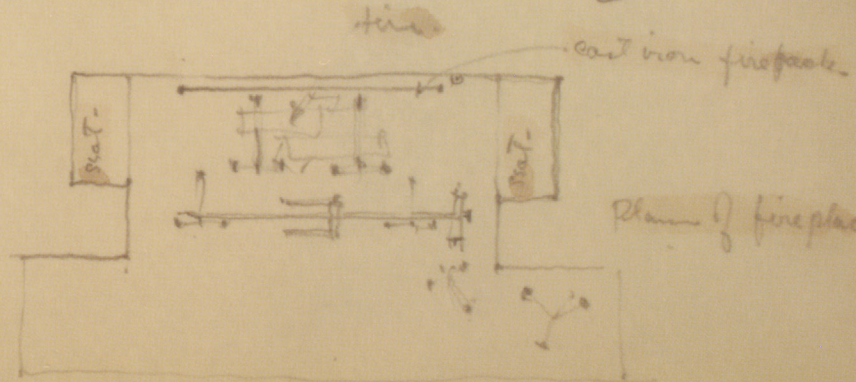


plate warmer
revolving top



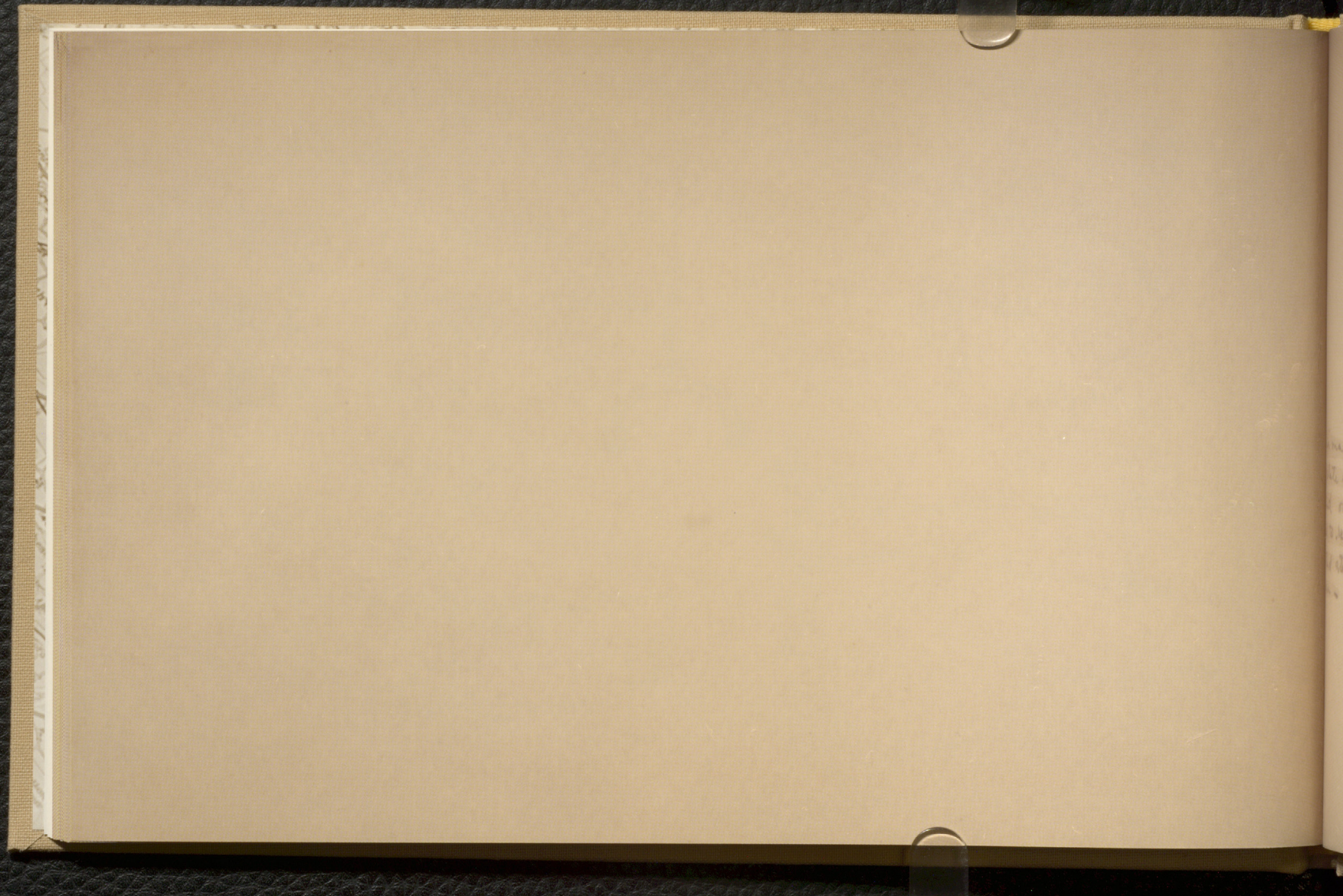
kettle crane



fire

cast iron fireplace

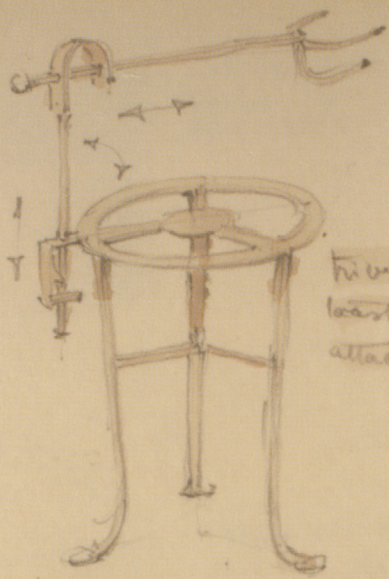
plan of fireplace





to enter

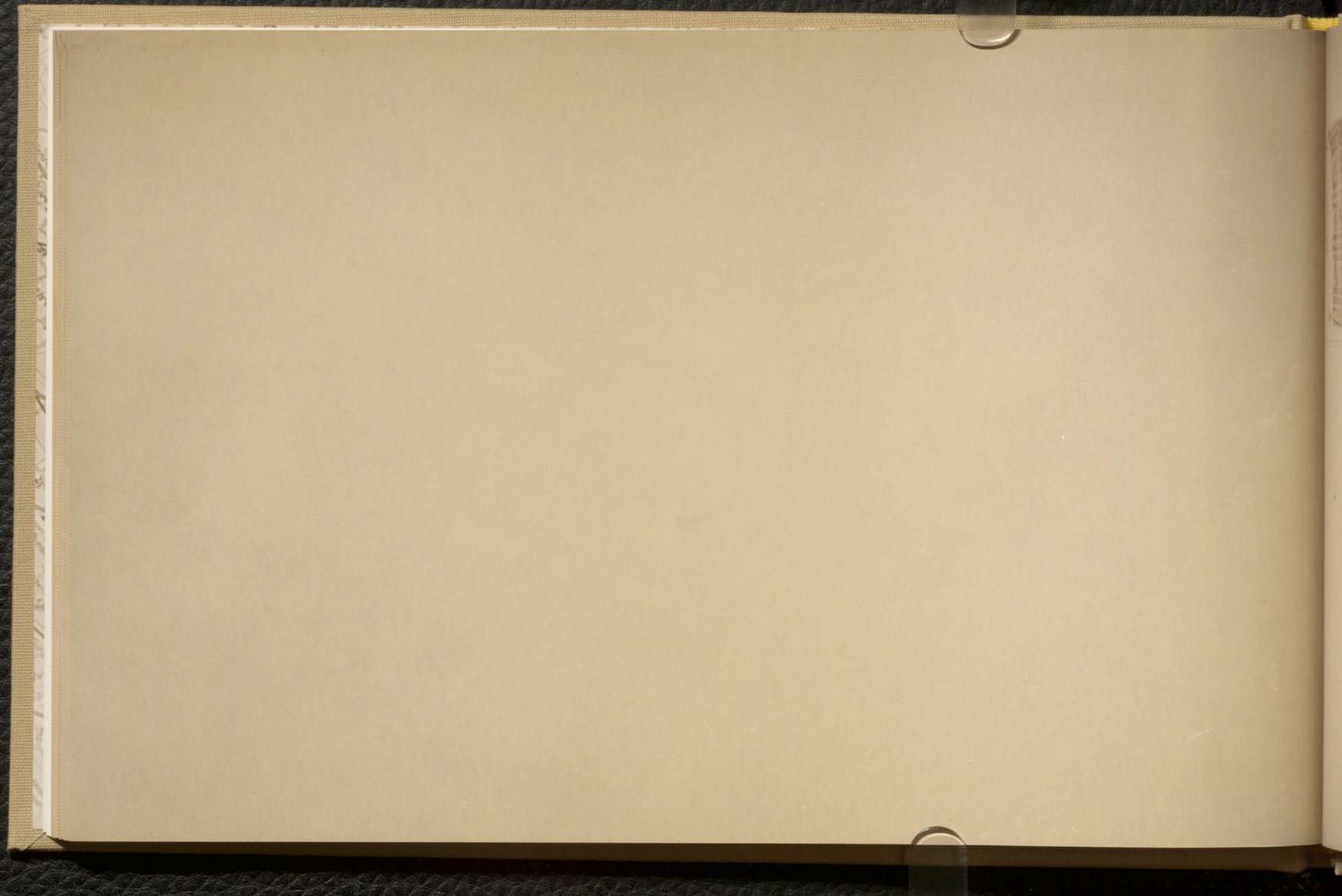
in marble
plate rack-
ind or as
u to keep
the stuff
in



front with
washing fork
attached.



upper part of
a fountain cor-
lrad. Dutch
1700





cart band.
distance
panel 100.



raised part smooth &
and very black



3 3/4"

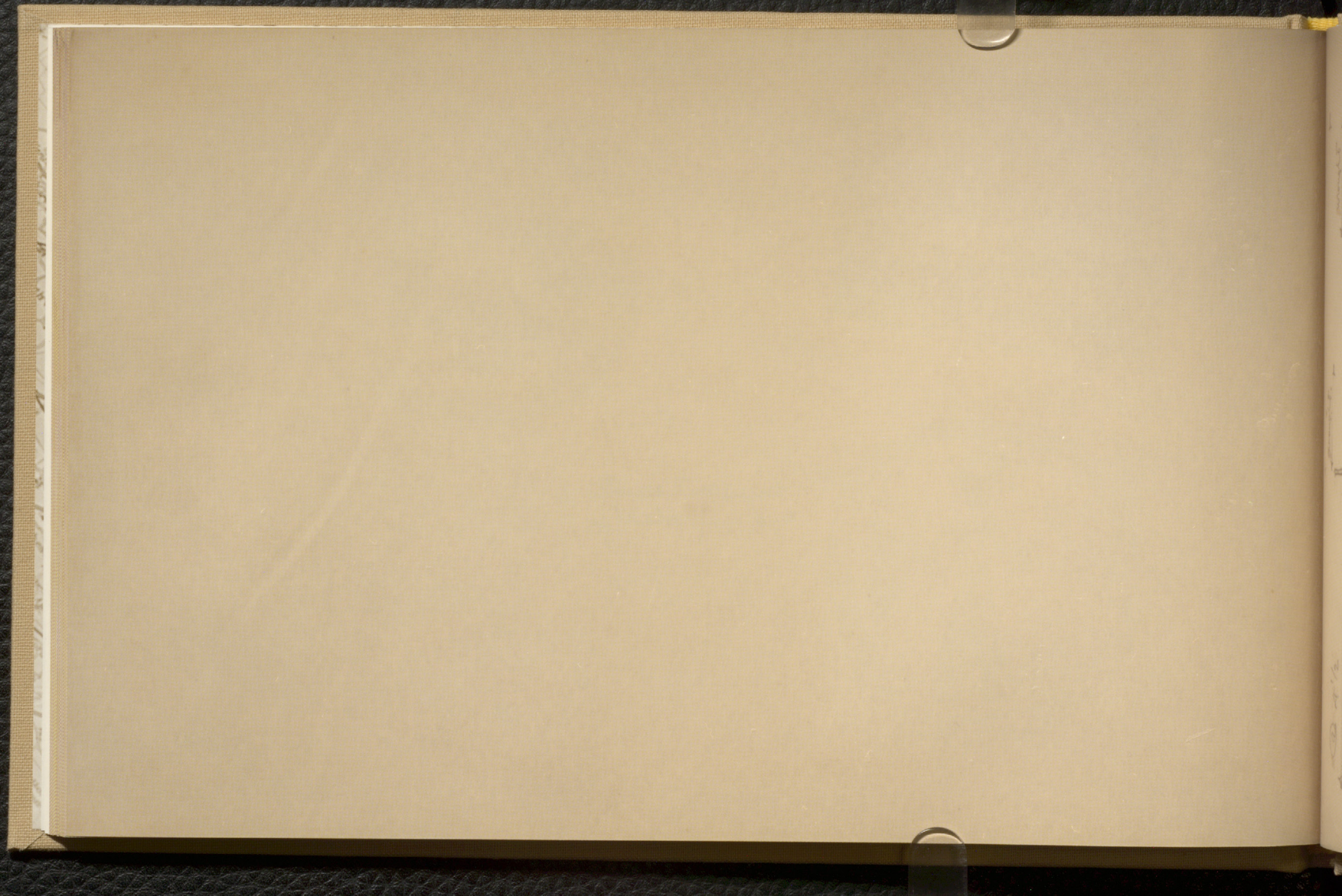
1 1/4"

3/4"

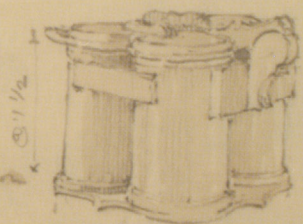
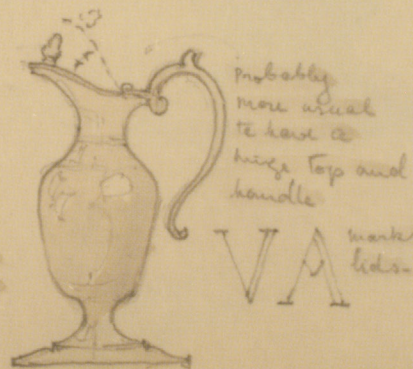
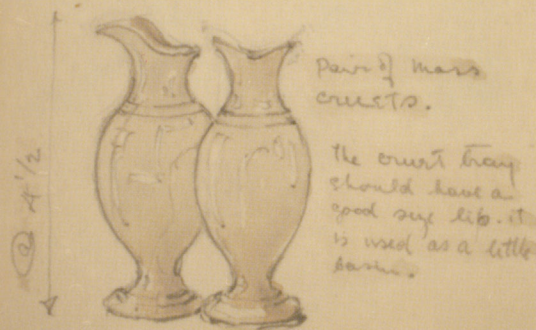
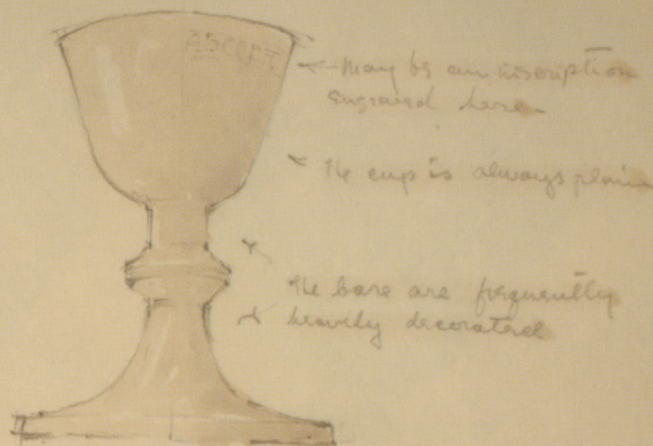
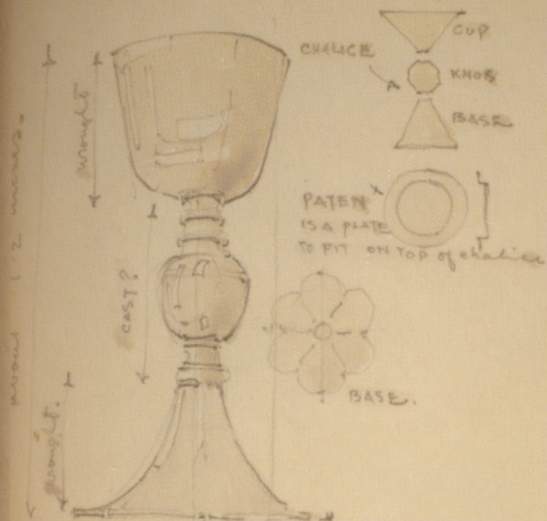
3/4"

3/4"

1/2"



Some Ecclesiastical vessels

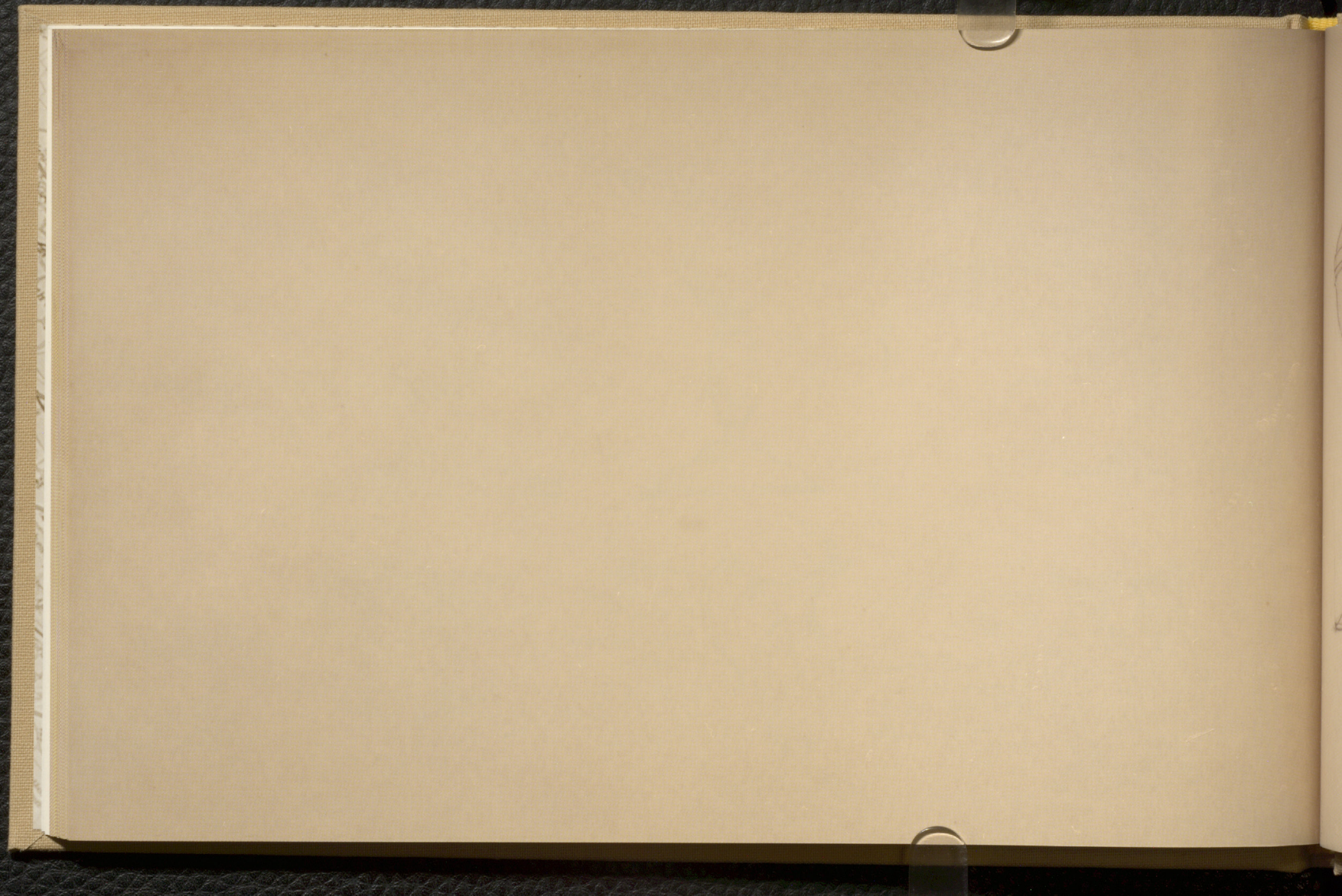


ciborium a vessel for the 3 holy oils

SC
1



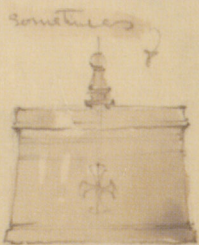
sometimes this way and frequently in ordinary box either square or round.





PYX

note the
method of
catching



sometimes

water buckets are carried
about during ceremonies
therefore the ornament is
splendid space

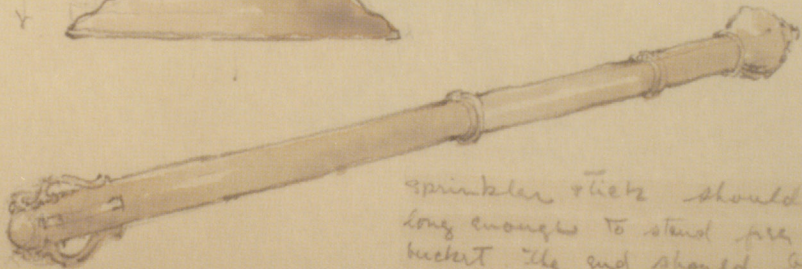
8 1/2"



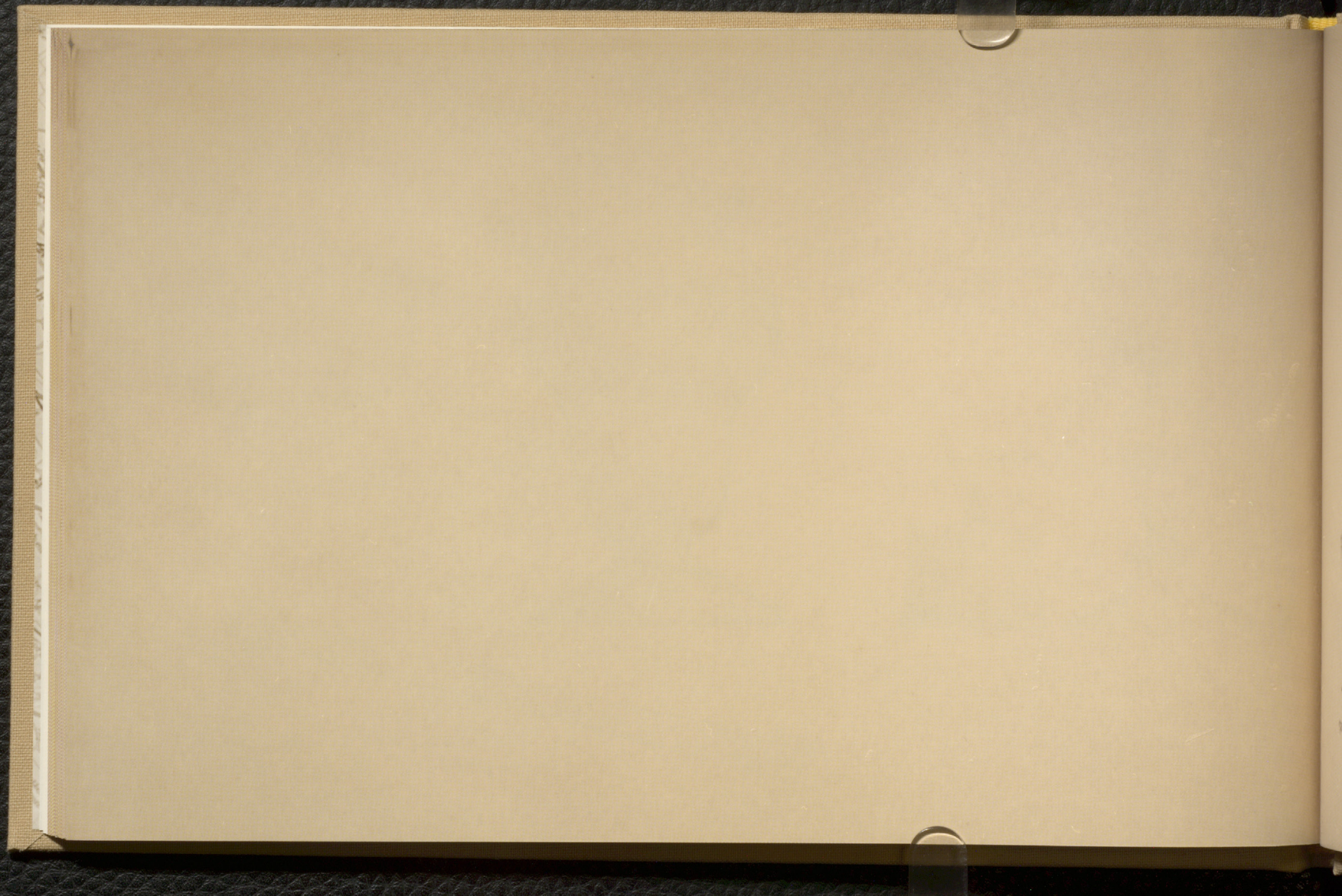
water
bucket

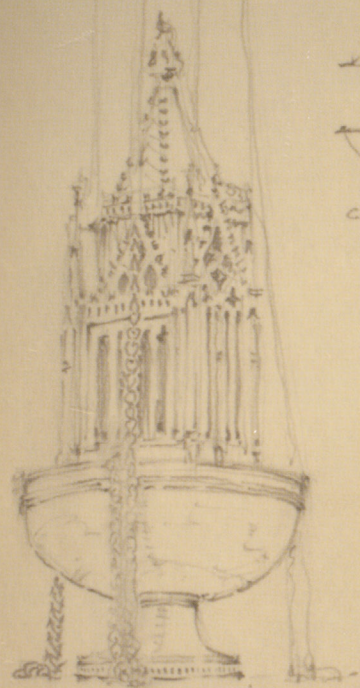


Sanctuary lamp

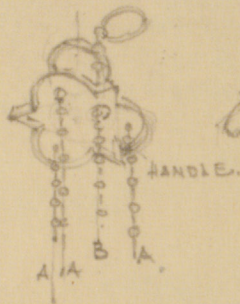
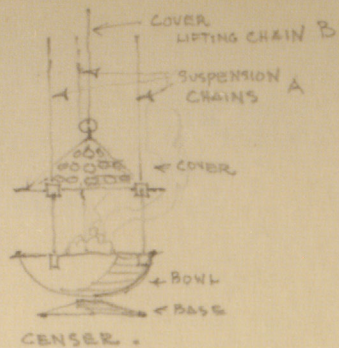


sprinkler sticks should be
long enough to stand up in the
bucket the end should be made
to collect the water

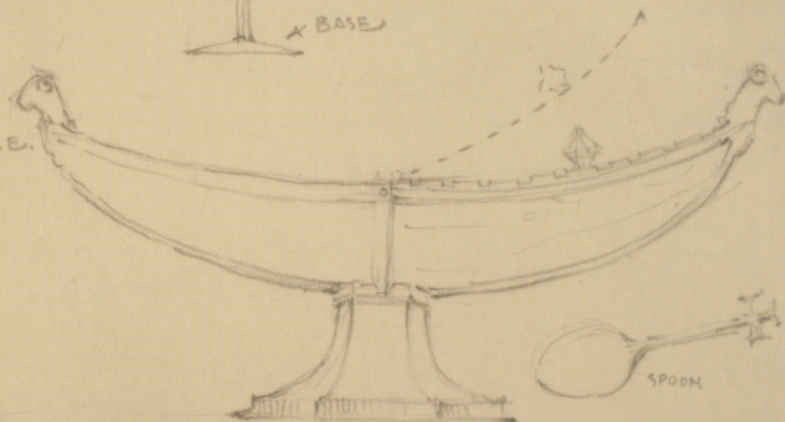
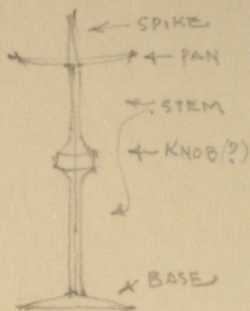




RAMSAY CENSER

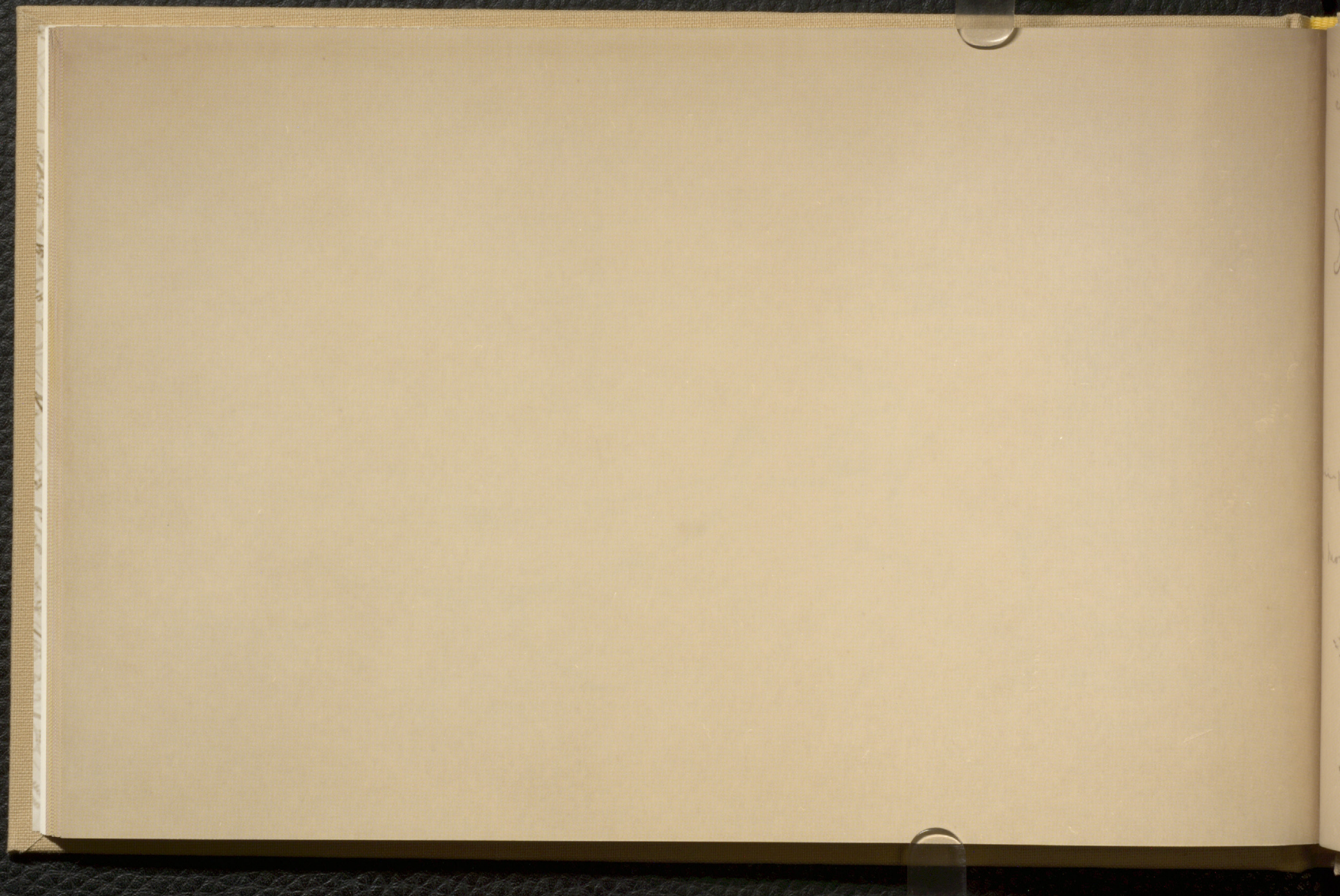


candle sticks

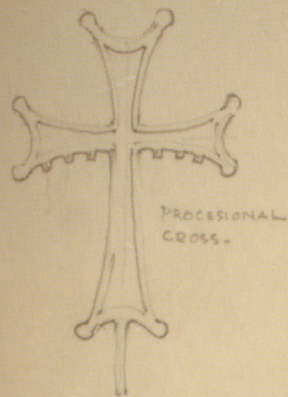


INCENSE BOAT.

SPOON

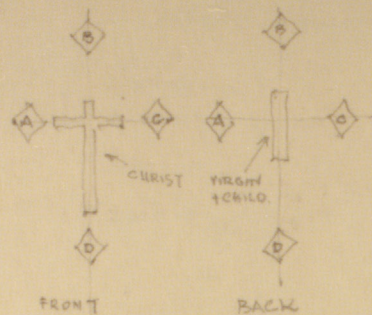


ecclesiastical metal work.
the cross.



simple form.

The monstrance.



A = Virgin.

B = Agnus dei(?)

C = St John

D = Patron or saint(?)

complete form(?)

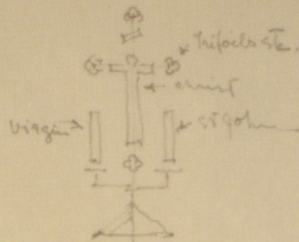
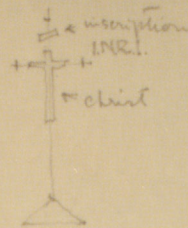
A = Bull

B = Eagle

C = Lion

D = Angel

Altar crosses -

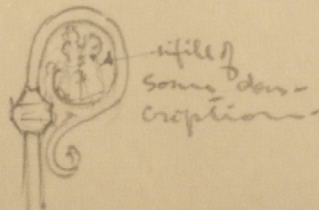
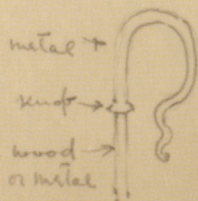


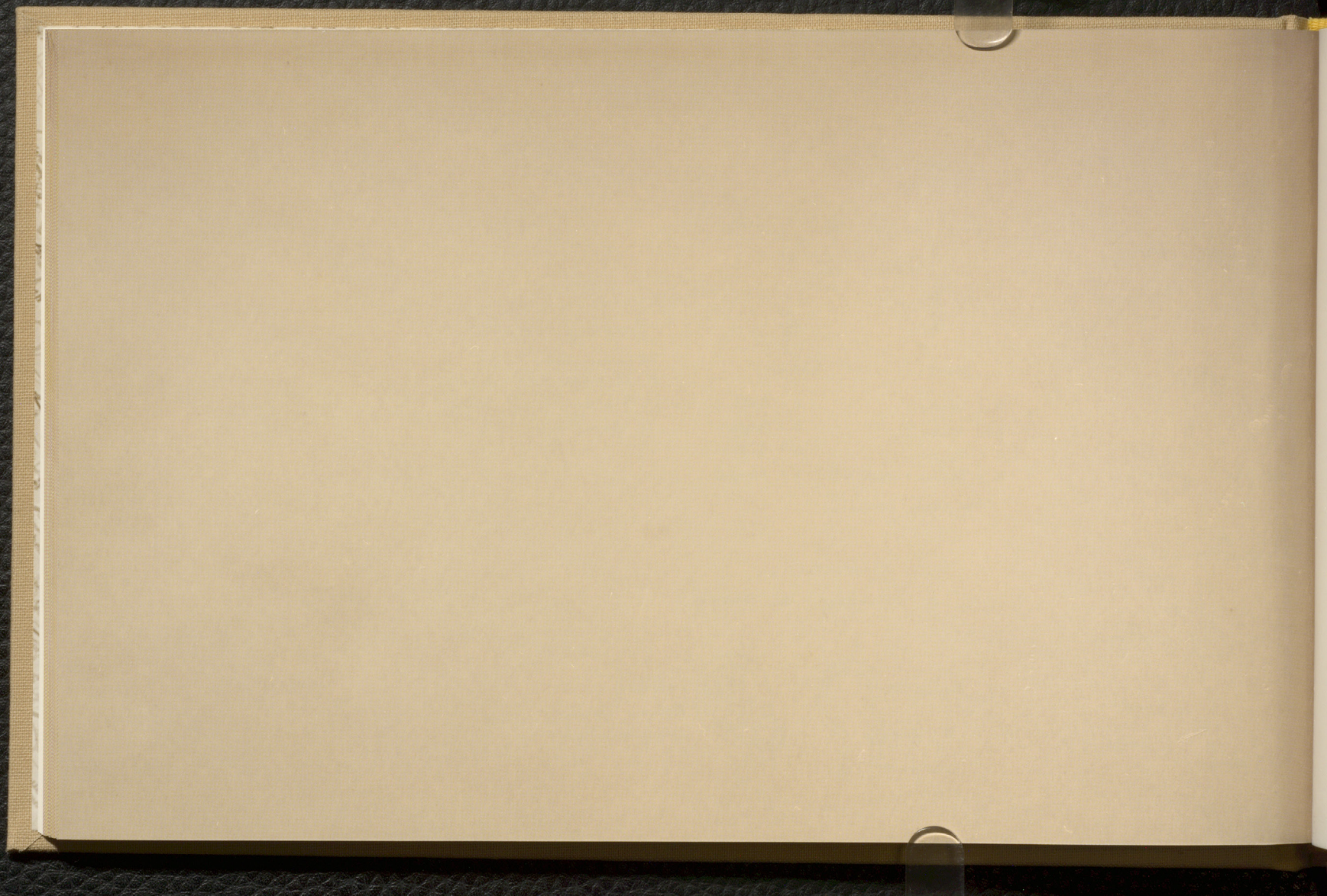
Simple form -

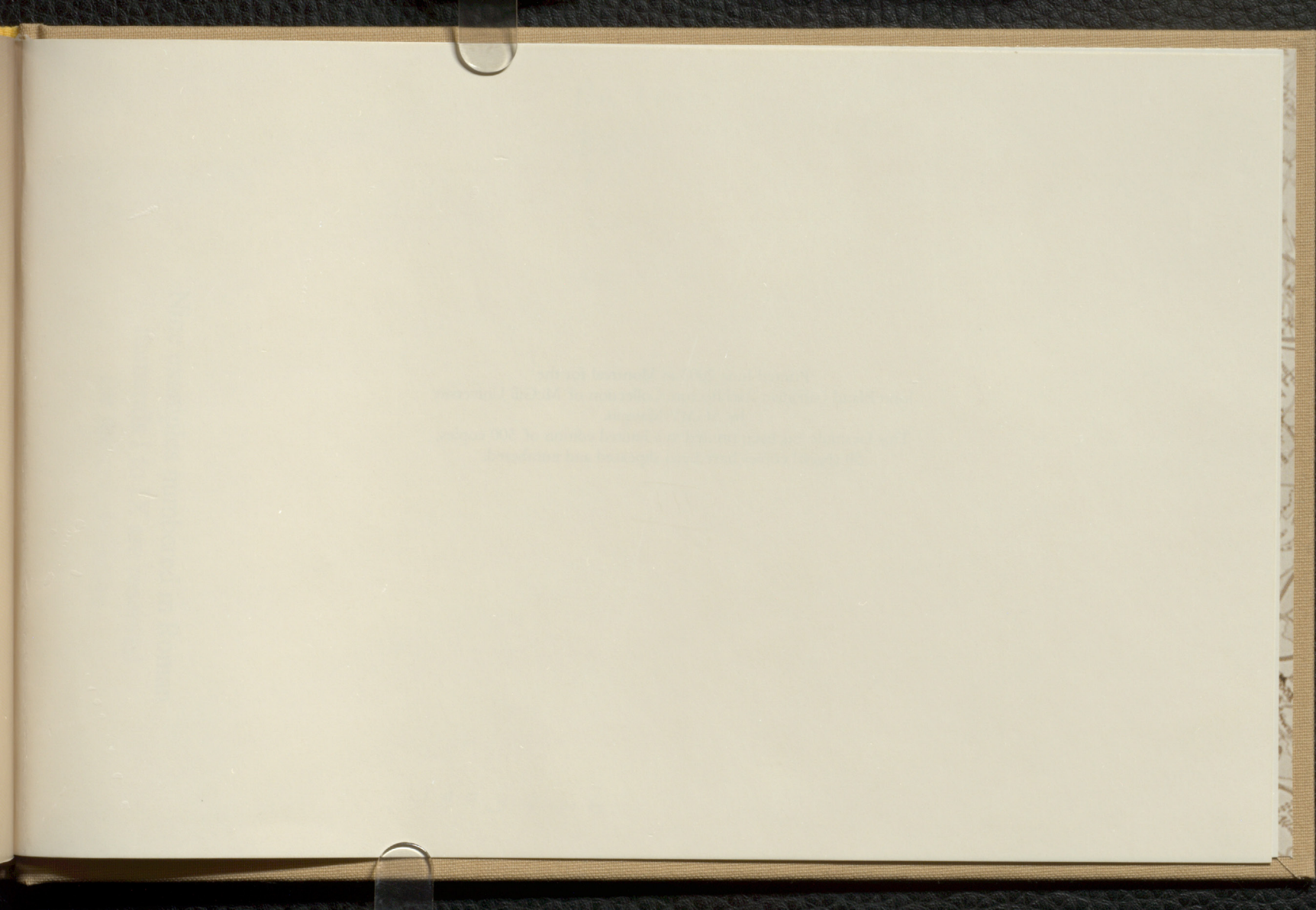
It may be hung.
or it may stand free
or I believe it may
be painted.

The Crozier.

is simply a crook.







Printed June 2003 in Montréal for the
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